

Oriental Bird Club



Bulletin 34

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December 2001

The Oriental Bird Club aims to:

■ encourage an interest
in the birds of the
Oriental Region and
their conservation

■ liaise with and
promote the work of
existing regional
societies

■ collate and publish
material on
Oriental birds

Two bulletins and a journal,
Forktail, are published annually.

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Membership of OBC

Membership of the Club is open to all and costs £15 per annum (£10 reduced rate for nationals living in Oriental countries who cannot afford the full rate), £20 Family, £25 Supporting Member (funding one Oriental member in addition to ordinary membership), £25 Libraries and academic institutions, and £45 Business Supporters. Special arrangements for payment exist in USA, Thailand and India. To join or for further details please contact the Membership Secretary, Oriental Bird Club, P.O. Box 324, Bedford, MK42 0WG, UK.

OBC Email Address

mail@orientalbirdclub.org

OBC Web Site

<http://www.orientalbirdclub.org/>

Cover photo:

Banded Pitta *Pitta guajana* by Martin Hale



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Letter from the Chairman

Nigel Collar

OBC and the Asian Red Data Book

Several years ago BirdLife International announced its work on identifying and documenting birds facing extinction in the Asian region, and made a special appeal to OBC members for information on a long candidate list of species. At the time I was not even on OBC Council, let alone its Chairman, but as senior editor of *Threatened Birds of Asia* I was inspired by the thought that BirdLife could enlist the support of such a body of expertise as is represented by the OBC membership.

I was not disappointed. The information that BirdLife received from OBC members was more than it could easily manage. So wearing my BirdLife hat I want to say thank you to all those who so generously and thoughtfully provided their records and insights for *Threatened Birds of Asia*; and wearing my OBC hat I want to say congratulations to everyone who contributed for taking part in a project in which OBC has so obvious and serious an interest.

The Smythies Fund

In late October every member was sent a copy of the Council-approved Statement of Aims for the Bertram Smythies Memorial Fund. It incorporates the views of members of the Club and articulates the concerted thinking of Council over the past two years or so. I hope it meets with general approval, and that it will be formally endorsed at the December AGM. If it is, we will publish it in full in the next spring Bulletin, so that it can be more firmly inscribed in the life of the Club than as a sheet of paper sent to members.

I particularly thank Graeme Spinks for crystallising our collective thinking and setting it out on paper, but also Steve Rowland for setting the ball rolling at the 1999 AGM and all members of Council for their input into this important statement.

Tip your hat to the new constitution

With a little help from our friends, Council has dusted off the original OBC constitution and this, too, is up for approval at the forthcoming AGM.

Some of the revisions have been driven by increasing clarification of the law by the Charity Commission; and some by the fact that bits and pieces of the old constitution were out of kilter with current circumstance.

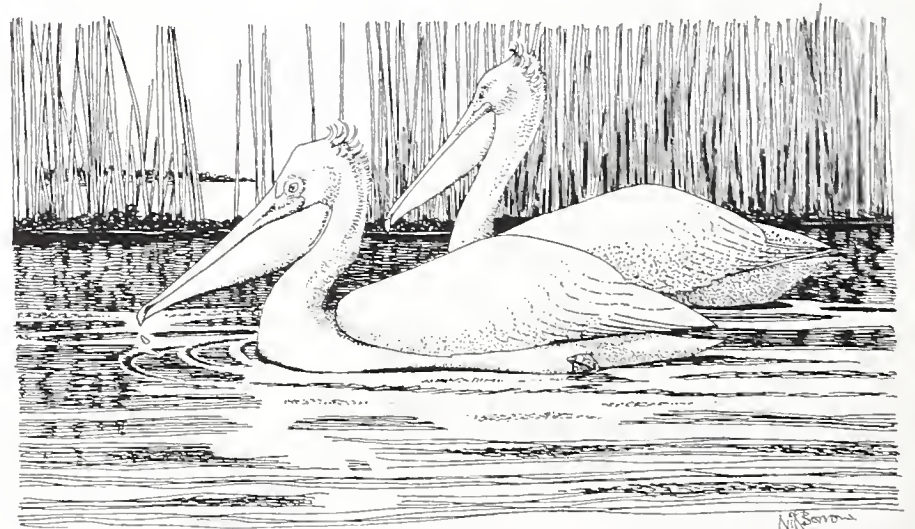
It doesn't make great Christmas reading, but we need this revised formulation. It brings us up to date and it clarifies the way the Club can operate from now on. The job has been pretty slow and painstaking, and I particularly want to thank, on all our behalves, Graeme Spinks, Richard Bosanquet, Margaret Sykes, Brian Sykes and Ed Keeble for the considerable time and trouble they have taken in getting us constitutionally into the twenty-first century.

Think members for Christmas

Wondering what to get a birding chum for Christmas? Trying to encourage your mum's dawning interest in birds? Can't afford that necklace for the special someone?

Give them all a year's membership of OBC. Imagine their faces lighting up as you show them this Bulletin and tell them they're getting two of these next year, *and* a copy of the evermore brilliant *Forktail*, *and* they can come to some wonderful meetings in 2002, *and* they are now members of a civil society grouping dedicated to the enhancement of the quality of human life through birds. I'm quite serious.

And a Happy Christmas to you, too.



Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus* by Nik Borrow
(Courtesy of Birdquest)

Club News

incorporating the Gurney's Pitta Campaign update



Reports of recent Club meetings and events

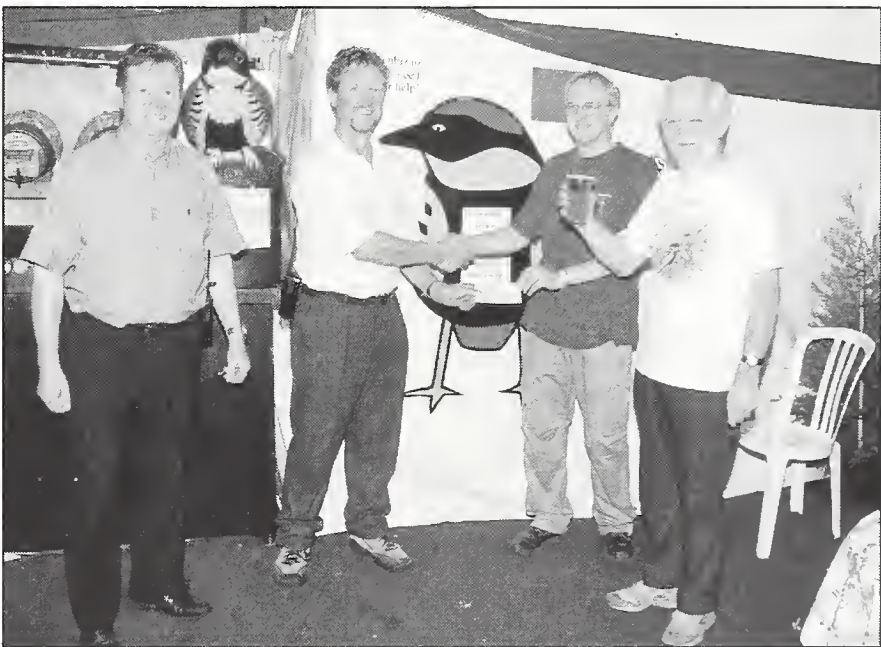
British Bird Watching Fair, August 2001

The Club had a very high profile again at the 2001 Bird Fair. On the stand itself, the prize draw ticket sales team had yet another Leica APO 77 Televivid scope to tempt the visitors. The Club's thanks go to Leica once again for their generous support. Special thanks go to volunteers Freda Eden (our evergreen star ticket sales person), Richard Eden, Richard Bosanquet, Vicki Harley and Adrian Pitches. Chairman Nigel Collar, now well coached by Freda, put his well-honed unique sales technique to good use once more. Sales fell short of the exceptional 2000 total, partly due to the weather and partly because the special effect of the Gurney's Pitta signature petition was missing this year.

The stand had a broader conservation theme than last year although some features sustained the emphasis on the Gurney's Pitta conservation campaign. The Gurney's Pitta 'Hall of Fame' featured some of the enterprising and individual ways members and friends had found to raise funds for the campaign. Chris Gooddie, whose magnificent effort in the London marathon was reported in Bulletin 33, headed the list with sponsorships finally topping £1200. The Jersey Zoo Bird Department's team of John Condron and Cillian Lohan ran the Jersey half-marathon in May and raised £700. The junior school children of the International School Bangkok, inspired by their teacher, OBC member Rob Heath, raised Bht 40,000 (about £670) and German member Eckhard



Eckhard Möller with his Pitta-Kiste (Pitta-box) on his 50th birthday



John Pryke (left) and Alastair Chapman of Prykeman Caterers handing over the Gurney's Pitta Bitter cheque to Nigel Collar and Brian Sykes



'Call my Ruff' in full flight at the 2001 Bird Fair

Möller dedicated his 50th birthday party to Gurney's Pitta and raised £600. Happy birthday and many happy returns Eckhard! A flyer was also produced especially for visitors summarising progress of the campaign since the 2000 Bird Fair.

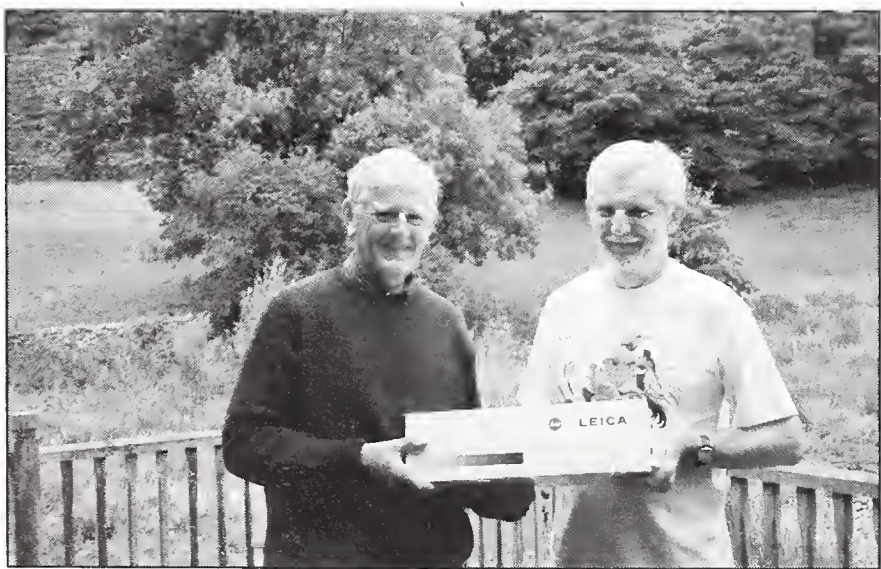
The giant Gurney's Pittas were again to be seen around the site with the one in the refreshment tent advertising the 'Gurney's Pitta Bitter' being particularly prominent. It was supported by the famously metamorphosed RSPB 'robin' still in his third incarnation as 'Mr Gurney Pitta' perched on the bar itself. This smart piece of promotion, the brainchild of Council member Steve Rowland, was a huge success and the beer sold out by lunch time on Sunday! A cheque for

£100 for the Save Gurney's Pitta fund was presented to the Chairman by John Pryke and Alastair Chapman of Prykeman the BBWF caterers. Gurney's Pitta Bitter beer mats were also used as a Club promotion in the refreshment tent.

Two giant Gurney's Pittas flanked the stage during the new panel game 'Call My Ruff' staged for the organisers by the OBC. The game was loosely based on a popular UK TV show 'Call my Bluff' and was well received by a large audience. It was chaired by OBC's Steve Rowland who, together with Mike Edgecombe, had dreamt up the questions. The competing teams were made up of well-known personalities from the birding world including OBC's Nigel Collar, Tony Juniper from FoE, Algirdas Knystautas, André Farrar, Mark Cocker and Iolo Williams.

OBC speakers were also prominent at the Fair, Tim Loseby, Krys Kazmierczak and Brian Sykes delivering talks on Sri Lanka, Goa and Gurney's Pitta respectively.

The Conservation Cup five-a-side football competition was back by popular demand for its third year. Marcus Kohler again masterminded the event. Sadly, despite the facts that only Marcus and wife Jane understand the scoring system, that their family dog is trained to run onto the pitch at strategic moments and that an injection of new blood replaced some tired old legs, the 'Forktail Palace' outfit still failed to impress. This year did, however, see the previously invincible RSPB team beaten in the final by an outfit named 'Brazil', although allegedly entered by the Neotropical Bird Club. Well, 'Forktails' there is always next year and the OBC conservation fund did benefit to the tune of £600, thanks to sponsorship from O.U.P. and WildSounds.



Mega Prize Draw winner Martin Broadgate (left) receiving his prize from Brian Sykes

OBC Cley Meeting, August 2001

This year's OBC Blakeney meeting was held on August 26 at Cley! The enforced change of venue did not detract from the event, which was again a great success. The cold dank weather may have contributed to the exceptional demand for 'Filby's Famous Curry.' The first talk on Sri Lanka was given by Gehan de Silva, who treated the audience to a wide-ranging presentation on the flora and fauna of this beautiful island. We then moved north to the Tibetan plateau thanks to Barry Wright, who gave a great preview of what those who might be planning to go on the OBC trip to Tibet might be letting themselves in for. After Brian Sykes's update on the Gurney's Pitta situation, Mike Edgecombe presented the second annual OBC Video Quiz. Scores were generally much higher than last year, but whether it was actually less challenging than in 2000 or whether we had been sharpening up our identification skills is a matter of opinion! The quiz looks set to become an established favourite.

Finally, the OBC 2001 Mega Prize Draw was made. The winner of the superb Leica APO Televid 77 telescope, donated by Leica, was OBC member Martin Broadgate, who received his prize from Secretary Brian Sykes a few weeks later. The second prize was a visit for two to Bharatpur donated by Raj Singh of Exotic Journeys, whilst the third prize was a voucher value £200 donated by WildSounds.

Once again Council would like to thank all the donors of the prizes which make the draw such a success: Leica, Lynx Edicions, A & C Black, Exotic Journeys, New Holland, O.U.P., Pica Press and WildSounds.

For the second year running, the day ended with a barbecue, more than 40 members and friends staying on even though the rain started on cue again, just as the food went on the grill!

Thanks to the speakers, Duncan Macdonald for the organisation (and to the WildSounds team for the books and tapes on sale), Mike Edgecombe for the quiz, and the ladies who helped with the refreshments throughout the day. Special thanks as always at this event to Dick Filby, who again displayed his range of culinary talents, as well as his compering skills.

Council has already determined to return to Cley in 2002. Just one small note, we could use a few more volunteers next year to help with the catering. Anyone prepared to help, please contact the Club in one of the usual ways.

Gurney's Pitta Campaign update

Since the last update (Bulletin 33 pp.17–19) a considerable part of the news relates to the fund- and profile-raising activities reported elsewhere in this Club News. A number of suggestions and proposals are under discussion with Thai officials and other interested parties but are not yet at the stage when they can be published.

Discussions with Thai officials

The Secretary visited Thailand during late May and early June. Thanks to the good offices of Dr Samaisukh Sophasan, a meeting was held with Privy Councillor Ampol in Bangkok. The Privy Councillor continues to be very interested and supportive. He advised that H.M. the Queen may lend her high profile support and may visit Khao Nor Chuchi (KNC) in spring 2002 as part of her official programme.

An encouraging meeting was held with the new Royal Forestry Department (RFD) Provincial Officer in Krabi province, Suthi Manotumpitak. He has been transferred from Trang province where he had achieved a good reputation working with village communities on habitat conservation projects.

Further meetings were held with the RFD Wildlife Conservation Director and his staff in Bangkok. The Director again expressed his intention to honour the pledges made by the Director-General of the RFD in October 2000. To date there is little substantive progress although the appointment noted above may change this situation.

Position at Khao Nor Chuchi site

Despite the various concerns publicly expressed by visitors unfamiliar with the complex situation, local informed reports continue to advise that encroachment and clearance by local people for farming has continued to be very low over the last two years. In the main this is attributed to the very wet weather over this period rather than improved protection or changes in attitude.

A very encouraging development was the agreement of the RFD for two rangers from KNC to attend a training course at Khao Yai National Park under the auspices of the WCS Thailand Programme. This is a big step forward as rangers normally receive little or no formal training. The training has been funded by the South Bangkok Rotary Club thanks to the initiative of OBC member Alec Napier.

A visit was made to KNC by the Secretary during June with Phil Round. Discussions were held with Yotin Meekaeo and Doug Judell at the end of his stint as the OBC liaison officer. Doug did not have an easy time at KNC. His experiences highlighted the difficulties in trying to balance the interests of the birds, local people and guides, and visiting birdwatchers of all shades of opinion and attitudes to conservation, whilst having to rely on goodwill rather than authority. Council's thanks go to Doug for his efforts under very difficult circumstances. Many lessons have been learnt, and discussions are in hand with Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BCST) to determine the best course of action for the 2002 birdwatching season. Revision of the 'Code of Conduct' has been completed.

The survey of Tambon Aw Tong (Trang province) by Yotin Meekaeo was relatively encouraging as two pairs and one additional male Gurney's Pitta were recorded in the area, which largely lies at higher elevation than the KNC WLS. Good numbers of other pitta species were also reported. Much of this area had been cleared for farming in the mid-90s but this has now effectively ceased due to protection by the Trang province 'Border Police'. Yotin estimates that 15 pairs of Gurney's Pitta (including the Aw Tong birds) were holding territories in 2001. The number of unattached birds was not estimated.

OBC Council again requests all Club members to advise friends or groups who are planning to visit KNC in 2002 to contact the Club. This is particularly relevant as it is understood that the RFD has plans to close some or all of the trails during the 2002 breeding season. Closure may take effect from May 1 and continue until August 31. OBC will keep up to date with the situation and give advice accordingly.

Thanks

Once again, Council wishes to thank Phil Round and Uthai Treesucon for their help and support. In addition, the efforts of John Parr during the short periods he has been in Thailand have been very valuable and John has put to good use his personal contacts within the RFD.

New donations to the 'Save Gurney's Pitta' fund

Council would like to thank Anthony Collerton for his donation of US\$ 1,500 and John Holmes of Hong Kong for his donation of £250.

Announcements

Sunbird to support study of newly discovered owl species in Sri Lanka

A new species of owl was discovered in the wet zone forest in Sri Lanka in January 2001 by Deepal Warakagoda (*OBC Bull.* 33: 43). It is the first discovery on the island in 132 years of a bird species new to science. Sunbird are donating £500 to help sponsor a three-year project which aims to determine the taxonomy, status, distribution, biology and ecology of the species.

Annual General Meeting, London, Saturday 1st December 2001

The AGM has returned to the traditional venue at the Zoological Society meeting rooms at Regent's Park. Doors will open at 11.00 am and there is the usual full programme of speakers, stalls and refreshments. The meeting will commence a little earlier than usual at 11.25 am due to the need to allow more time for the AGM. The AGM is scheduled to commence at 12.15pm and we hope that as many members as possible will attend. In addition to the normal business Council is seeking the approval of the membership for the 'Statement of Aims' for the Bertram Smythies Memorial Fund and for amendments to the Constitution. The latter has been updated to meet the needs of the early 21st century and to take account of the change in the Club's profile thanks to the legacy from Bertram Smythies.

Dutch Birding Meeting, Utrecht, Saturday 9th February 2002.

At the invitation of Dutch Birding, OBC will be participating in this event. Brian Sykes will review the 'Save Gurney's Pitta' campaign and there will be a second talk on the Oriental region. OBC sales items will be available during the day. We hope that as many Dutch members as possible will attend and members from the UK and other parts of Europe will be very welcome. Please contact the Club via the usual channels if you plan to attend. Further information will be posted on the Club website and 'orientalbirding' as soon as it is available.

OBC tour to Tibet – 2002

Dates for the tour have now been finalised and are slightly different from those advised in the preliminary announcement.

The tour, led by Jesper Hornskov, will run from July 27 (departure from Beijing to Xining)

to August 14 (return to Beijing). The slightly later schedule unfortunately means that participants will not now be able to attend the I.O.C. meeting in Beijing which starts on August 11. The cost of the tour (including return internal flights between Beijing and Xining) will be US\$2780. The tour is limited to a maximum of 10 people; to secure a place a non-refundable deposit of £100 is required. A full provisional itinerary, species list and all other necessary details are available from Council member Mike Edgecombe. Anyone interested should contact Mike immediately via the normal Club address or email.

'Subscription renewal time again!'

If your subscription is due for renewal on 1 January 2002, and you do not pay by banker's order, a renewal form was sent out with the AGM papers. Please renew right away! Early renewal of your subscription helps the administration greatly and also saves members' money. Publications for members who renew late are mailed out individually at substantial extra cost to the Club and make extra work for the Membership Secretary.

Thanks again!

The thanks of Council go to all the members who visited the Club stand – either at the British Bird Watching Fair or the Cley meeting – and picked up their copy of *Forktail* 17. An even bigger thank you goes to those members from overseas who volunteered to carry *Forktail* back for friends and colleagues. In all about 280 copies were distributed at a saving of almost £300 on mailing cost. Look out for *Forktail* 18 at the 2002 Bird Fair.

OBC Corporate Members – who they are and what they do

It has been some time since the OBC Corporate Members have been featured in Club News. The Corporate Membership scheme was started in 1992 with the objective to make it the backbone of the Honorary Membership fund. Participants in the scheme pay an annual subscription of £45 and each corporate membership pays the subscription of three honorary members. At present there are some 20 corporate members and they support about 50% of the 125 honorary members of the Club. OBC Corporate Members in 2001 are: *Bird Information Service, Bird Line North East, Birdquest, Birdwatch, Tom Gullick, Helm Information, Kadoorie Farm & Botanic Garden Corporation, Lama Parivar, Limosa Holidays, Lynx*

Edicions, Murphy's Wildlife Holidays, Naturetrek, New Holland Publishers, North West Birding, Ranzweli Holiday Village, Subbuteo Natural History Books, Victor Emanuel Nature Tours, Wildlife Computing Services, WildSounds, and WildWings. The thanks of the Club goes to all our Corporate Members and we look forward to welcoming more in 2002.

OBC Supporting Members

The remainder of the honorary members are paid for by the Supporting Membership scheme. In this case the members pay £25 and support one honorary member. If they wish they may nominate a deserving individual themselves. In 2001 there are more than 60 Supporting Members playing a major role in the Honorary Membership fund. The Club's thanks goes to them too!

Why not join one of the above schemes in 2002?

Back numbers of *Forktail*

As announced in Bulletin 33 (p.4), the Club is still interested in obtaining copies of *Forktail* 1–5. Please contact the Secretary if you can help.

OBC T-shirts and sweatshirt designs

The range of T-shirts and sweatshirts featuring the Club 'Forktail' logo and the caption 'Oriental Bird Club' on the left breast are proving increasingly popular with members. The T-shirts are available in bottle green, royal blue or teal. The sweatshirts are available in bottle green, royal blue and light grey. All the above are available in three sizes, medium, large and extra large.

The two T-shirts designed for the Club by Thai artist Kamol Komolphalin are still available, although stocks of his beautiful 'Save Gurney's Pitta' T-shirt are getting low. There are good stocks of the second design, 'Magical Birds of Thailand', a montage of beautiful and interesting birds. Both designs are produced in unbleached pre-shrunk cotton. Two sizes are available, medium and large [up to 44" chest].

All items are available by mail order and full details are included in the enclosed sales leaflet. Orders are also accepted by email.

Advertise in the OBC Bulletin

Council would like to thank all the organisations advertising regularly in the OBC Bulletin. Advertisements help to offset the cost of production and the benefit to the Club from this is significant.

The standard Bulletin advertisement rates [black & white] are: full page £135; half page £85;

quarter page £60. Colour advertisements are available at extra cost.

Please contact Richard Thomas via the normal Club address or email.

The Club and the Internet

The Club email address may be used to notify the Club of address changes, membership renewals, sales orders and general enquiries. Contributions for the Club publications may also be submitted in this way. Please ensure that contributions and attachments sent to the Club are virus-free. If you have any doubts about the system you use, please mail a hard copy as back-up.

Mail sent to the Club email address <mail@orientalbirdclub.org> is forwarded to the appropriate Council member for attention.

The Club website at <<http://www.orientalbirdclub.org>> contains information of interest to members and prospective members alike. Members are requested to draw it to the attention of potential new members who want further information about the Club. Thanks once again go to Alan Wilkinson for his work on maintaining the site.

Members are also reminded about 'orientalbirding', the email discussion group closely associated with the Club. The group, which is moderated by Council member Krys Kazmierczak, continues to flourish and has a membership of over 900. Many topics are introduced and often create lively discussion, but please remember that the opinions expressed are those of the writers, not those of OBC Council and are not representative of Club policy. It is free, so why not give it a try? To join simply send an email [which may be left blank] to <orientalbirding-subscribe@yahoogroups.com>.

Stop Press!

The Club has a new mail address

Effective immediately all correspondence should be sent to:

Oriental Bird Club
P.O. Box 324
Bedford
MK42 0WG
U.K.

Obituary

Humayun Abdulali, 1914–2001



Humayun Abdulali entered the world of natural history through oology. As a boy, his interest in egg-collecting led to *shikar*, and a life-long passion for birds and things natural. He was such an accomplished naturalist that Charles McCann once commented that Humayun 'knew something about everything.' In his passing away, on 3 June 2001, the birding world lost a champion ornithologist and India her most 'compleat' naturalist.

Born on 19 May 1914 in Kobe, Japan, Abdulali became seriously interested in the study of birds during his college days. While studying zoology at St. Xavier's College in Bombay, he put together a 'credible study collection of birds of the Bombay area for the college museum'. Later, this collection, along with Sálim Ali's notes, formed the basis for a joint paper on 'The birds of Bombay and Salsette', published in six parts (1936–1939) in the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (Journal)*. But Abdulali had begun his tryst with the *Journal* much earlier, in 1931, when his first note was published entitled 'Eleven Koel eggs in a crow's nest.' In the following 70 years his prolific 348 contributions to various publications covered a breathtakingly vast field of natural history ranging from reptiles, fish, amphibians, mammals, insects, wildlife law, *shikar*, trade in wildlife, etc.

In 1968 Abdulali began to catalogue the 26,000 bird skins in the collection of the BNHS. The result was his 37-part serialised paper, 'A catalogue of the birds in the collection of the BNHS', published in the *Journal* (1968–1996). This allowed him to name 16 races of birds of which at least 9 are still in use. Contemporaries in turn honoured him with eponyms for two races and one species of Aves: *Pycnonotus cafer humayuni* Deignan, 1951; *Accipiter virgatus abdulalii* G.F. Mees, 1980; *Otus alius* Rasmussen, 1998; and one frog, *Nyctibatrachus humayuni* Bhaduri & Kripalani, 1955.

Yet he was not just a taxonomist ensconced with museum skins. There couldn't have been a better field naturalist than Humayun. His eight trips to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and the resulting papers stand as ample proof of his abilities. His knowledge of the birds of India is amply illustrated through his full-length papers

and miscellaneous notes in the *Journal*. Indeed, he was the Honorary Secretary of the BNHS from 1949–1961 and editor of the Society's *Journal* (along with H. Santapau) for volumes 57–59. The Society's welfare was very dear to Abdulali till his very last breath.

Humayun Abdulali was instrumental in drafting the Bombay Wild Animals and Wild Birds Protection Act of 1951. This was the first such legislation in India and was later adopted almost in totality by the Government of India for its Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

Borivli National Park is another of Abdulali's 'gifts' to the people of India. During his tenure as Hon. Secretary, the BNHS successfully represented to the Government of Maharashtra that this area be protected. An area of about 90 sq km was so designated several years later and today serves as a green lung for the teeming metropolis of Mumbai. Later, when a national highway was planned through the Park, Abdulali went to court against its construction. He knew the consequence of losing that suit would be the destruction of Borivli. Single-handedly he waged a lengthy legal battle for a cause that would benefit the general public, and won. Sadly, he also suffered injury in Borivli. One day, four thugs surrounded his wife and him and demanded their possessions. Abdulali of course: refused. Angered, they pelted him with stones, one of which struck his binoculars. Infuriated, he fought them and got hospitalised. He was never the same again.

Abdulali established that it was not necessary to be a full-time scientist to contribute to science. One could even do so while in another profession. He was the quintessential amateur. He was genuinely interested in sharing his love for natural history, especially with youngsters, and could often be seen with them in Borivli. He was a warm-hearted human being with a great sense of humour and charm. He was ready to help all those who asked him and many present-day birdwatchers benefited from his knowledge. His death is deeply mourned by all those who knew him and his work.

Aasheesh Pittie, 8-2-545 Road No. 7, Banjara Hills, Hyderabad 500034, India; email: aasheesh@vsnl.in



Conservation Fund

Compiled by Marcus Kohler with contributions from Andy Clements, Mike Crosby, Geoff Hilton, Carol Inskipp, Mark Gurney and Phil McGowan

We are pleased to announce that OBC has awarded eight new awards with four projects in Nepal, two in India, one from China and our very first project in Myanmar. We have received 14 reports from OBC-sponsored projects. These reports show the great range of conservation work in the region that the OBC grants system generates. We are grateful to all members who support the fund through purchasing OBC goods and tee-shirts and sincerely hope that reports such as these bring home the importance of the work we are supporting.

We have reports of three major awards: the 1998 Forktail-Leica Award on the study of Storm's Stork in Sabah and two excellent WildWings Conservation Awareness Awards including the 1999 award to the late Sam Veasna for conservation of the Bengal Florican in Cambodia which has produced outstanding work, and is a fitting tribute to Veasna and his colleagues who have continued and developed his vision.

There are 11 reports on a variety of small grant projects: seven from India, two from Nepal, one from China and one from Indonesia.

GRANT ANNOUNCEMENTS

Publication of Bird Conservation Nepal newsletter in vernacular language (Nepali)

See Conservation Fund in Action for a report on the first year of the newsletter

Ananta Bhattarai and Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) have been awarded a further small grant for a second year's publication of the BCN newsletter *Munal* in the Nepali language. This newsletter is aimed at schoolchildren and the wider non-English reading public across Nepal. The first Nepali editions of the newsletter proved very successful, with a growing readership and an increasing print run. The OBC small grant will ensure that this important publication becomes established across Nepal.

Bird posters for conservation awareness in schools and communities in the buffer zone of Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal

Govinda Adhikari and the Bird Education Society in Nepal have been awarded a small grant of £500 to raise conservation awareness in Tharu people in the densely populated buffer zone of Royal Chitwan National Park. The project will publish colourful and attractive posters on the threatened birds of Chitwan and use these to generate interest among schoolchildren and the community. A Nepali news bulletin *Panchhi* will also be published.

Study of vultures in western lowland Nepal

A small grant of £500 will contribute to the current debate on drastic declines in vulture populations through a study to be carried out by Jeet Bahadur Giri and Som G.C. in Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in western lowland Nepal. Vultures have been reported as almost entirely absent from eastern and central Nepal in 2001, but these observers have seen substantial numbers of

WildSounds



Oriental Bird Club



White-rumped Vultures *Gyps bengalensis*, Long-billed Vultures *G. indicus* and Eurasian Griffons *G. fulvus* in Suklaphanta in April 2001. The study will focus on estimating population size, breeding success, food availability and mortality. The surveys will be carried out between October 2001 and May 2002. Money raised from the Conservation Cup, the annual five-a-side charity football tournament at the Bird Fair, will fund this project. We are grateful to WildSounds for their sponsorship of the Conservation Cup.

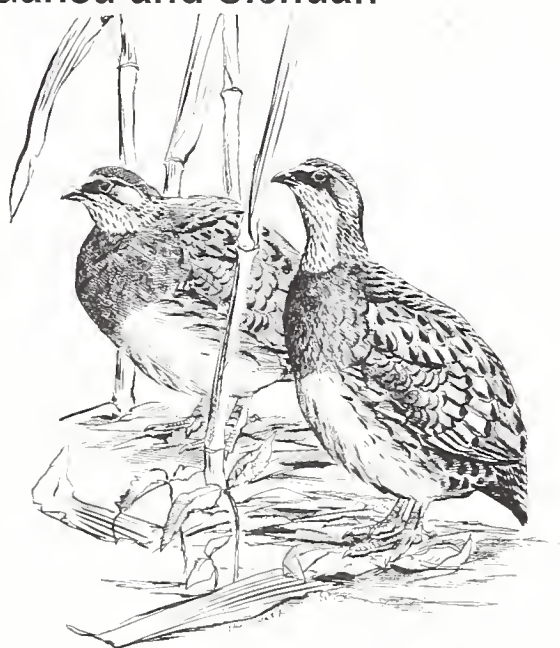
Conservation planning for Pallas's Fish Eagle in selected areas of Bangladesh

The Centre for Natural Resource Studies in Bangladesh has been awarded a small grant of £500 to determine the status and habitat requirements of the globally vulnerable and little-known Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*. The eagle will be studied in an area of north-east of Bangladesh where depressions between rivers hold semi-permanent lakes or 'beels'. The interactions of the local community will be studied and taken into account in the preparation of a conservation plan for the eagle.

Survey of the avifauna of the Laokhowa and Burha- Chapori Wildlife Sanctuaries, Assam

A small grant has been awarded to Kulojyoti Lahkar to conduct survey work and develop an action plan for two poorly known protected areas in Assam. The Laokhowa and Burha-Chapori Wildlife Sanctuaries form an Important Bird Area within one of Asia's biodiversity hotspots and potentially hold a number of species of global concern typical of north-east India, such as Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius*, Lesser Adjutant *L. javanicus*, Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*, Dalmatian Pelican *Pelecanus crispus*, Spot-billed Pelican *P. philippensis*, Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*, Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, Swamp Francolin *Francolinus gularis*, and Marsh Babbler *Pellorneum palustre*. In a valuable awareness-raising move, local students will be invited to participate in the survey. A report documenting the avifauna and the current threats will be distributed to local stakeholders.

Survey of the Sichuan Jay in Gansu and Sichuan



Detailed, long-term studies have been conducted on the distribution and ecology of many of the threatened galliformes and waterbirds of China, but there has been remarkably little work on most of the endemic passerines. We are therefore very pleased to award a small grant to Jing Ju for a study of the Sichuan Jay *Perisoreus internigrans*, a poorly known endemic of the subalpine coniferous forests of west Sichuan and adjacent parts of Gansu, Tibet and Qinghai. The project will collect data on population density and habitat requirements, and make preliminary conservation recommendations for the species and its habitat, which has been greatly reduced by logging activities in the past 40 years.

Sichuan Partridge *Arborophila rufipectus*, a Sichuan endemic, by Dan Cole

Ecology of White-browed Nuthatch in Natmatuang, Myanmar



White-browed Nuthatch *Sitta victoriae* by Dave Farrow

White-browed Nuthatch *Sitta victoriae* is a globally endangered species recorded only from the area around Mount Victoria (Natmatuang) in Myanmar. Little is known about its ecology, and this study by Thet Zaw Naing will attempt to gather data on habitat selection and nest sites of the nuthatch so that we can identify the most important areas for the species. The study area also contains other globally threatened birds such as Mrs Hume's Pheasant *Syrnaticus humiae*, Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii*, Grey Sibia *Heterophasia gracilis*, and Broad-billed Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni*. Records will be kept of these and other species encountered during the survey, helping to give Natmatuang National Park a higher priority.

Ecology and breeding of Sri Lanka Frogmouth

A small grant has been awarded to K. V. Eldhose to study the ecology and breeding biology of Sri Lanka Frogmouth *Batrachostomus moniliger* in Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary in the Western Ghats in Kerala, India. The species is a poorly known endemic of India and Sri Lanka. To date there have been no studies made of this frogmouth.

CONSERVATION FUND REPORTS OF GRANT ASSISTED WORK

Major Awards

1998 Forktail Leica Award: A preliminary survey of Storm's Stork in the lower Kinabatangan floodplain, Sabah, Malaysia



LEICA



Storm's Stork *Ciconia stormi* by Dave Showler

Storm's Stork *Ciconia stormi* is an endangered species occurring only in Peninsular Malaysia, Sumatra, and Borneo. Between March 1999 and January 2000, Storm's Storks were surveyed in the lower Kinabatangan floodplain in Sabah. The aims of the survey were to provide an estimate of the population in the study area, to collect information on the storks that occurred outside the current Kinabatangan Wildlife Sanctuary, and to assess habitat use.

The survey was conducted from a boat that was taken along the main Kinabatangan river and its tributaries, with additional dry-land areas being covered by vehicles. Hundreds of kilometres of waterways were covered in this way.

Over 125 days of survey work, there were 83 sightings of the species, thought to relate to a total of 35 adults and eight juveniles. Smaller numbers were recorded in modified agricultural habitats while 11 adults and four juveniles were found outside the proposed wildlife sanctuary.

Forest clearance continues and may pose a considerable threat. Although some of the favoured habitats are protected within the wildlife sanctuary, further areas should be added. Other recommendations include further studies on the species' biology and habitat use and greater co-operation between government agencies and NGOs in managing the area and halting illegal deforestation.

Zainal Abidin bin Ja'afar, Mike Ching Hee Nam
and Mike H.N Chong
Kinabatangan Orang Utan Conservation Project
PO Box 3109, 90734 Sandakan,
Sabah, Malaysia

**1999 OBC/WildWings
Conservation Awareness
Award: Bengal Florican
conservation in Kompong
Thom Province, Cambodia**



In 1999 Sam Veasna won an OBC small grant to survey Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* and other waterbirds in Kompong Thom Province, Cambodia. During the survey, a new population of Bengal Floricans *Houbaropsis bengalensis* was discovered, and enquiries at local villages and markets suggested that as many as 300–600 floricans were killed each year for meat. This threat prompted Sam to propose further work to assess the status of the florican population and to continue the conservation awareness programme that he had already started.

Tragically Sam died a few days before the announcement granting him the OBC/Wildwings Conservation Awareness Award 1999, but the award was transferred to his colleagues with the support of the Wildlife Conservation Society–Cambodia Program. The aims of the project were to collect further data about the florican population in the province, to identify key sites for the species, and to make villagers and local authorities aware of the importance of conserving the florican population.

The area was visited between 15 February and 21 March and surveyed on foot, by tractor, and by boat. The team visited the locations where Veasna had recorded the floricans, and local villagers took the surveyors to sites where they had seen birds in previous days. Further 2–3 day visits were made between April and August to a key area to monitor the floricans and to document the distribution of other waterbirds.

Thirty-four male and eight female floricans were seen at three sites during the course of the project, including at least four birds at a new site in Chikreng district, and two nests at Krous Kraom – the first confirmed breeding record for Cambodia. The floricans appeared to favour a mosaic of tall and short grass with patchy dense scrub and fallow fields.

Hunting was identified as the most significant threat to the floricans and other large waterbirds, and nest destruction through ploughing may also affect the florican population. However, the rotational ploughing could serve to maintain suitable habitat for the birds.

The awareness campaign used video presentations, posters, and a bird drawing competition with books and tee-shirts as prizes. Over 1,900 people attended the presentations and whilst the impact on their understanding and behaviour is difficult to assess, there have been improvements in enforcing hunting legislation. Twelve other globally threatened or near-threatened species were recorded during the survey, including White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni* and Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius*. Although only one ibis was seen, the Greater Adjutant flock contained at least 84 birds, and the survey area may support 15% of the known world population of this species. Also of interest were at least 10 birds that were thought to be Manchurian Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus tangorum* – at present the only known wintering site for this species is in south-west Thailand.

Frédéric Goes, Hong Chamnan, Pete Davidson, Colin Poole
Wildlife Conservation Society Cambodia Program
PO Box 1620, Phnom Penh, Cambodia

2000 OBC/WildWings Conservation Awareness Award: Wildlife camp for Bandung high school students, Indonesia



Since 1998 KONUS (Konservasi Alam Nusantara), an NGO based in Bandung, West Java, has been carrying out a public awareness programme. A key part of this has been the development of a wildlife camp for high school students. The idea behind this camp is that students learn by experiencing wildlife for themselves. The camp is mainly aimed at first grade high school students and their teachers, and 16–20 participants are selected for each camp. This grant supported two camps, in March and June 2001. The camp was conducted at the 530 ha Pangandaran Nature and Recreation Park (PNRP), a famous tourist destination about 250 km from Bandung.

The camp involved five educators from KONUS and seven voluntary teaching assistants from both KONUS and PNRP. Various audio-visual materials were produced, including printed materials, slides and a wildlife CD. Binoculars, guidebooks and projectors were also provided. Birds and primates were used to introduce basic wildlife watching, ecology and conservation themes as both are attractive and relatively easy to see around the park. The three-day field camp culminated in an identification competition.

As a follow-up to the first camps, a newsletter called *Habitat* was established to help students who took part to maintain contact. The second issue was due to be published in August 2001, and contributions from students had already been received. Regular meetings are planned with the students to promote local interest through, for example, the creation of nestboxes and bird-watching around their schools.

Made Wedana Adi Putra

Konservasi Alam Nusantara

Jl. Pamekar Raya No. 10, Panhegar Permai III, Bandung 40613,
Indonesia

Reports from small grants in Nepal

Population status and distribution of Bengal Floricorn in Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal

See the article on page 30 for a detailed report on the team's previous OBC-funded work.

Bijay Tamang, Nabin Baral and Nilesh Timilsina received an OBC small grant to undertake fieldwork during the breeding season (April–May 2001) on the distribution and status of Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* in Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal (RCNP). An attempt to analyse factors affecting the presence or absence of floricans was also made. This study completed an update on the status of the species throughout Nepal, following recent similar surveys in Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (RSWR) and Royal Bardia National Park (RBNP).

Observations on territory-holding males were made in the early mornings and evenings when birds are most active. As females are very difficult to locate, population estimates are based on an assumption of equal sex ratio.

During nine days survey, four floricans were recorded (three males and one female) from four of the grassland sites. Anecdotal evidence from the sightings of guides, naturalists and other park staff indicated a potential total of 11 individuals over the previous



Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* in display flight by Hil Bruinsma

few months. This population range of 4–11 birds in 2001 represents a 50% decline from that reported by Inskipp & Inskipp (1982). In addition to a smaller population size, results this year indicate that floricans may shift their population around the phantas in RCNP.

The study looked at management practices which were found unsuitable for conserving and enhancing florican habitat. Local people now only have five days to cut grass for thatching and tractor mowing was noted during the breeding season. Unsuitable management interventions may be a cause of the florican population decline in Chitwan.

The report on national status in Nepal again unfortunately records a decline with a maximum of 23 floricans in Nepal in 2001. Maximum numbers for RSWR were 14, and for RBNP only five, both showing a slight decline since 1991. This national picture assumes no records for Koshi Tappu.

Recommendations are that the Bengal Florican should be the flagship species for grassland management practices in the terai. Strict burning and harvesting regimes should be applied, in patches, to create better florican habitat. In addition the interaction of floricans with other grassland species should be studied, leading to an integrated conservation strategy for all characteristic grassland species.

Bijay Tamang, PO Box 907,
Kathmandu,
Nepal

Publishing the Bird Conservation Nepal newsletter in the Nepali language

An OBC small grant was awarded to Ananta Bhattarai and Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) early in 2001 to translate and publish a BCN newsletter into the local Nepali language. The objectives of this project were to enable schoolchildren to learn about birds, to reach an audience unable to understand English and which therefore does not already read BCN's English newsletter, *Danphe*, to inform local people and tour guides about birds and their behaviour and to raise awareness of the global messages of nature conservation.

Three issues of the Nepali newsletter were published during 2001. The Nepali newsletter is named *Munal* (the Nepali name for the Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyra*, a well-known bird in Nepal). The content and style of the newsletter are very much aimed at schoolchildren with activities including quizzes and painting.

Articles include information on threatened species such as the Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis*, introductions to global institutions such as BirdLife International, celebrations of Nepali birdwatchers and scientists, and information about the World Bird Festival. The publication run for each issue is 1,500 copies and growing.

Bird Conservation Nepal
PO Box 12465, Kathmandu,
Nepal

Catalogue of India's heronries

Reports from small grants in India

This study presents an overview of the distribution, status and conservation needs of India's heronries. The information was collected in two phases. During the first phase (1993–94), questionnaires were sent to over 400 birdwatchers, ornithologists and naturalists in different parts of India and over 200 responses were received. The second phase (1995 to early 1996) was made possible by an OBC small grant (£500). Over 300 additional birdwatchers were contacted and information on nearly 100 more heronries was gathered. In addition, information was extracted from published literature and from internet sources, particularly from email discussion groups.

Information was gathered on over 698 nesting sites of 26 waterbird species. This indicated a distinct concentration of 534 existing sites in southern India, western and northern central India and Assam in the north-east. The distribution of all nesting sites was mapped. Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger*, Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*, Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* and Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* were the commonest nesting species.

Over the last century, at least 164 sites have been lost to tree-felling, disturbance of nests, poaching of eggs, nestlings and even nesting birds as well as to natural factors such as floods, cyclones and droughts. The study also revealed an understanding of how heronries come into existence and the fact that only a small proportion of existing heronries was found to be protected. Protection against disturbance and habitat destruction should be pursued and more heronries should be brought under state protection. Identifying and protecting large roost sites of colonial waterbirds may help nesting birds in the long term. Regular planting and care of preferred tree saplings needs to be carried out in and around heronries, while afforestation of the banks of tanks, with *Acacia* saplings for instance, will help to provide future nesting sites.

Nearly 80% of heronries are located within or close to human habitations. It is important, therefore, to educate people of the need to protect nesting sites. For example, the Village Pelican Conservation Group has been active at the Kokkare Bellur village pelicanry since 1995 and has saved and raised the nestlings of over 100 Spot-billed Pelicans *Pelecanus philippensis* and over 200 Painted Storks *Mycteria leucocephala*. Efforts should also be made to encourage local NGOs to identify and protect heronries, particularly where nesting sites are located on private property.

Dr S. Subramanya
231, Chitramala Apartments
Byrasandra, Bangalore 560 011
India

Avifauna of sacred groves in Kerala, India

Surveys of sacred groves in the Kannur District of Kerala were carried out from February to May 1996 and from March 1997 to May 1998 funded by two OBC small grants. The origin of the 'Kavu' can be traced back to prehistoric times when they were used by Kerala's inhabitants as places of worship to the ancient

gods. When the forests were cleared for human habitation and agriculture, the Kavus were untouched, being protected by taboos believed to invoke the wrath of the gods. With natural forest cover at less than 8% they are now important for the conservation of Kerala's biodiversity.

The Kavus withstood pressures of population increase and resultant demands for timber and agricultural land until shortly after Indian independence in 1947 when traditional culture, social beliefs and taboos were challenged. The very existence of Kavus was threatened in the 1960s and 1970s as they were cleared for agriculture. Today they survive as forest islands in densely populated areas. Kavus are usually privately owned and the absence of any legal protection renders them particularly vulnerable.

Ironically, the current threats to the Kavus are from 'believers' building concrete temples inside the Kavus funded by selling timber from the Kavus. A new law to protect these groves is under preparation by the state government. Several floristic and socio-cultural studies of sacred groves have been conducted but there is no record of any avifaunal studies.

Four Kavus of Kannur District, ranging in area from 1–35 acres and at altitudes from 30–40 m, were studied in detail. The surrounding areas were similar; typical north Kerala village environments with a mosaic of homesteads and a wide variety of agricultural plantations such as coconut, areca nut, cashew, pepper and rubber.

A total of 102 bird species, 82 of them residents and 20 migrants, was recorded during the study period. Four restricted-range species of the Western Ghats Endemic Bird Area were found: Malabar Parakeet *Psittacula columboides*, Grey-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus priocephalus*, Rufous Babbler *Turdoides subrufus* and Crimson-backed Sunbird *Nectarinia minima*. Forest birds totalled 47 species, of which 20 were found to nest in or around the groves and utilise the surrounding plantations for foraging and nesting.

One of the main aims of the project was to create awareness amongst local people and government agencies of the importance of conserving sacred groves. Efforts were made to make locals aware of the importance of the groves, and cattle-grazing and tree-felling were stopped completely at one site. Slide talks were conducted for science and nature clubs of local schools and colleges, and three talks highlighting the importance of the sacred groves were delivered on local radio. Data for a chapter on birds were contributed to a book, *The Sacred Groves of North Kerala – A Socio-cultural-Ecological Study* by E. Unnikrishnan.

C. Sashikumar

9 Subhash Nagar, Kannur 670002

India

Bird communities of the proposed Naina and Pindari Wildlife Sanctuaries in the Kumaon Himalaya, Uttranchal, India

This project built on an earlier set of OBC-funded forest surveys in the Kumaon Himalaya, an important part of the Western Himalayan Endemic Bird Area. The area is known to hold populations of several globally threatened galliformes, including Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii* and Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan*

satyra, as well as threatened mammals such as Serow and Snow Leopard.

The bird communities of two forest areas were studied – Vinaiyak (Naini Tal District) and Pindari (Bageshwar District). Vinaiyak has an area of 15.3 km² and an altitudinal range of 1,900–2,600 m, while the larger Pindari forest tract has an area of 58 km² and covers an altitudinal range of 1,500–3,500 m, extending into the grassland of the alpine zone.

Surveys were conducted during both pre- and post-monsoon seasons in 1998 and 2000, using a stratified random sampling procedure to achieve coverage of all the main habitats within each study area. A GIS was used to map habitats and bird diversity in the study areas.

A total of 201 bird species was recorded (122 in Pindari and 166 in Vinaiyak), including Satyr Tragopan. The restricted-range Western Himalayan endemic White-throated Tit *Aegithalos niveogularis* was recorded at both sites. Cheer Pheasant was not recorded, although Koklass Pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha* and Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos* were recorded in both areas, and Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* was seen in Pindari.

The forests of the Kumaon Himalaya are clearly of considerable importance, but only 3% of the land area is currently protected, in two wildlife wanctuaries that are both under intense pressure. Two new wildlife wanctuaries for the region are proposed: 145 km² in the Pindari area, and 87 km² in Kilberry-Vinaiyak-Kunjakhark. These proposed reserves lie close to the existing Nanda Devi Biosphere Reserve and Corbett National Park, providing an opportunity to link these areas.

Aisha Sultana, M. Shah Hussain & Jamal A. Khan
c/o Wildlife Society of India
Centre of Wildlife, AMU,
Aligarh-202002, India

Production of the book '*Birds: beyond watching*'

Abdul Jamal Urfi received an OBC small grant in 1997 for the production of a book aiming to provide an accessible introduction to birdwatching in India. His magnum opus – *Birds: beyond watching* – is now complete and lives up to its title. This book takes the reader from very basic birdwatching skills into topics such as behavioural ecology, census techniques and taxonomy. The book aims both to enthuse and to educate. The style is lively and personal, with many anecdotes from a lifetime studying birds, and the text is frequently inter-cut with quotations from other ornithologists – especially Salim Ali. There are chapters on most areas of interest to the budding ornithologist: birdwatching, habitats, names and classification, breeding, migration, censusing and conservation. Each chapter ends with sections giving suggested practical activities and further reading that build on the topics discussed in the main text. A set of appendices give a wide range of practical background information, listing a range of ornithological websites, addresses for bird study organizations and conservation NGOs, and even giving suggestions for how and where to buy optical equipment. The book is of potentially enormous value in making the study of birds both accessible and

attractive to the vast Indian audience it is aimed at. It conveys a real passion for birds – and conservation – while giving a huge amount of information that can be understood by the beginner, but will also be of value to the experienced. It is to be hoped that many people in India will develop an interest in birds through reading this book.

Abdul Jamal Urfi
Sundarvan, Surenda Mangaidas Road
Jodhpur Tekra, Ahmedabad
India 380015

Wildlife surveys of some areas in the Chamba District of Himachal Pradesh, India



Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*
by Craig Robson

Rahul Kaul of the World Pheasant Association has discovered important new populations of the globally threatened Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii* and Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus* in Chamba District, Western Himalayas. Until the 1990s, almost nothing was known about the region's wildlife and this project formed part of a larger, ongoing study to uncover new information. The area is now a Critical Priority Endemic Bird Area, with 11 restricted-range bird species.

The key habitats in the region are Himalayan temperate, subalpine and subtropical forests, as well as montane grassland. The team conducted 70 km of walked transects through the three main forest types during spring (April–May) 2000. The emphasis of the work was on galliforms: population densities of these species were estimated using a quantitative method of dawn point counts, which has been employed in similar studies in the Himalayas in recent years.

A total of 84 species was recorded during the fieldwork and both Cheer Pheasant and Western Tragopan were widely distributed in the study area. Other galliform species recorded were Koklass Pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha*, Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*, Hill Partridge *Arbophila torqueola* and Snowcock *Tetraogallus* sp. Spectacled Finch *Callacanthus burtoni* was also recorded in the alpine forest. Important new information was gathered showing that the bird community of the alpine forests had strikingly little overlap with that of lower-altitude forests.

Evidence was found of considerable hunting pressure, partly for local consumption but also for export. It is proposed that the status of this area be upgraded from 'Reserved Forest' to 'Wildlife Sanctuary', to safeguard both the natural resources of the area, and the water security of the people dwelling in the valleys.

Rahul Kaul & J.S. Jandrotia
c/o WWF India, 172B Lodhi Estate
New Delhi 110 003
India

Study of Nilgiri Laughingthrush, Tamil Nadu, India

Nilgiri Laughingthrush *Garrulax cachimans* is one of 16 bird species endemic to the Western Ghats Endemic Bird Area. It has a very restricted range, above 1,200 m in the upper Nilgiri Hills, and usually above 1,900 m in the Western Ghats. It is confined to dense undergrowth and moist vegetation in the lower storey of evergreen and semi-evergreen forest, especially wooded ravines and hollows (sholas) and forest edge. There was no estimate of the species'

population until this study was carried out from February to December 2000. The study was jointly funded by an OBC small grant and the Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History.

Information on the distribution of the Nilgiri Laughingthrush was collected from the literature, birdwatchers and various museums inside and outside the country. Known and likely areas (identified using GIS and remote sensing tools) were then surveyed, mostly in the environs of the Nilgiris, including the Attappady Valley and Sispara-Walakkad in the Silent Valley.

The survey revealed that the species is facing local extinction in a few areas. The Upper Nilgiri plateau still supports the major population but the species was not found in smaller and more isolated sholas or in highly disturbed sholas. A total of 1.12 adult birds/ha was found inside the protected areas, but only 0.52/ha outside these areas. The mapped area of shola forest was estimated to support about 1,400 adult individuals. Some 500–600 ha of the shola forest, however, could not be mapped and analysed but was estimated to have 320–384 birds (0.64 birds/ha). In plantations adjacent to sholas only 0.1 birds/ha were observed and hence the total in plantations was estimated to be 100–200 birds. Thus the total population of the species is estimated at between 1,800 and 2,000 in an area of about 1800 ha of shola forest.

This study reiterates the importance of the shola forests for this endangered species. The following recommendations are made: shola forests and grasslands should not be converted into plantations of any kind; the species' entire habitat in the Nilgiris should be included in the renamed Murkuthi National Park and Nilgiri Laughingthrush Sanctuary. Finally, shola forests should be restored with the involvement of the local community.

Lalitha Vijayan, V. Gokula and S. N. Prasad
Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History
Anaikatty, Coimbatore 641 108
India

The Birds of Eaglenest and Sessa Orchid Sanctuaries, Arunachal Pradesh, India

The Eastern Himalayas region has a rich but poorly known avifauna. As an Endemic Bird Area, it is one of the most important parts of Asia for biodiversity conservation. Funded by an OBC Small Grant, Anwaruddin Choudhury conducted bird surveys from 1997–2000 in and around Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary (27°02'-09'N, 92°18'-35'E), and Sessa Orchid Sanctuary (27°06'-10'N, 92°27'-35'E) in Arunachal Pradesh, north-east India. The study area comprises some of the last wilderness areas left in the state, and ranges from lowland tropical evergreen forest to Himalayan temperate forest at more than 3,000 m.

Two globally vulnerable species – Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* and Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra* – were discovered, though both appear to be rare. Another vulnerable species, Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii*, has been reported in the area previously. No fewer than nine near-threatened species were observed, along with numerous restricted-range species. There were 16 new elevation records, and an impressive total of 373 bird species has now been recorded



Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii*
by Hil Bruinsma

from the area. All of this greatly extends our knowledge of the status of important birds in the area, and enhances the case for its conservation. Among many other interesting bird records was India's second Radde's Warbler *Phylloscopus schwarzi*!

Poaching is a significant threat in the periphery of the protected areas and the construction of a road through the Eaglenest Sanctuary threatens to allow increased disturbance and erosion. A number of recommendations is made. These included extending the Eaglenest Sanctuary into a new area that holds a number of key bird species; encouraging ecotourism in the area; a programme of awareness-raising in surrounding villages, particularly concerning the watershed protection value of the forest; and improved protection measures for the sanctuaries.

Dr Anwaruddin Choudhury,
c/o The Rhino Foundation for Nature in NE India,
The Assam Co. Ltd., G. Bordoloi Path,
Bamunimaidam, Guwahati 781 021
Assam, India

Report from Indonesia

Conservation education material for schoolchildren in and around Bali Barat National Park, Indonesia

Bali Barat National Park lies at the western end of Bali and was established in 1984. It has witnessed the continual decrease in numbers of the only bird species endemic to Bali, the Bali Myna *Leucopsar rothschildi*. In June 2001 the wild population was estimated to be six individuals at most. The aim of this project was to provide awareness to children who might become the future poachers of the Bali Myna, so that they might not grow up to catch the birds, if the species still survives in the wild at that time.

Study sheets about the park's birds, animals, and ecosystems were created for use during visits to elementary schools in and around the national park to teach children about the fauna and flora of their surroundings. The Bali Myna and four other bird species were depicted in a style similar to that of field guides, and when instructions to colour them in were followed, a child could use the pictures to recognise each species in the field. School presentations were made to 18 schools around the park; pupils were given a photocopied set of the study sheets as well as a box of crayons, and then the teaching team worked through the sheets with the students. A poster of the Bali Myna was displayed during the classroom presentations, and life-sized drawings of other birds, mammals and butterflies were painted as examples for the students. Whenever possible, fresh leaves, fruits and flowers of the trees described in the study sheets were given to the students to look at and feel.

The children took part actively in the lessons and the teaching team was told of interesting encounters that the children had had with the animals illustrated in the study sheets, such as a sea turtle laying eggs on the beach and of encounters with snakes. This allowed the teacher to explain the conservation laws applying to the national park. In conclusion, fact-oriented education allowing the transfer of knowledge is much sought after and eagerly

received in West Bali schools. It is hoped that this will have a positive influence on the behaviour of the young adults of the future towards the national park and its most famous and most threatened species, the Bali Myna.

Elisabeth Laine
d/a Rumah Makan Nawang Wulan
Jalan Raya Gilimanuk, Gilimanuk, Bali (82253), Indonesia

Report from China

Wintering ecology of the Oriental Stork in East Dongting Lake National Nature Reserve, China



Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus squamatus* by Hil Bruinsma

The Dongting Lakes in Hunan Province, China, are a vast complex of freshwater lakes and inter-connecting rivers and drainage channels in the lower Yangtze basin. In summer they flood and unite, forming the second largest lake in China. During the winter, these wetlands support large flocks of wintering waterbirds, including Oriental Stork *Ciconia boyciana*, Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*, Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus squamatus*, Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus* and over 30% of the world population of Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* has been counted there. It is also a probable wintering area for Swinhoe's Rail *Coturnicops exquisitus* and Japanese Swamp Warbler *Locustella pryeri*.

A study of the wintering ecology of the Oriental Stork was conducted in the reserve from December 1999 to January 2000. The species is estimated to have a total breeding population of only 600–700 pairs, with c.3,000 birds migrating south each autumn, but fewer than half of these return to the breeding grounds in spring, indicating a high mortality rate on migration and in winter. A total of 131 storks was counted in winter 1999/2000, very similar to the average of 129 birds recorded in 1989–1995. The storks face a multitude of threats: uncontrolled fishing, severe human disturbance in their feeding areas, illegal hunting and poaching, poisoning of wildfowl and water pollution from paper mills and other factories.

The following recommendations for future activities were made to enhance the effectiveness of current conservation efforts: the establishment of a small wetland education and awareness centre in the reserve, and a mobile environmental education unit to visit local communities. Attempts to lessen the impact of fishing on wintering waterbirds should be made and fishing exclusion zones strictly enforced. Silt input and small-scale pollution in the basin catchment should be reduced to national environmental standards. Finally, a detailed survey of wintering Oriental Storks should be conducted throughout the middle and lower Yangtze basin to help develop an overall action plan for the species.

Ma Yajing, Lei Gang & Jiang Yong
Wetlands International China Programme & East Dongting Lake
Nature Reserve Management Bureau, Yueyang City, 41400, P.R. of China

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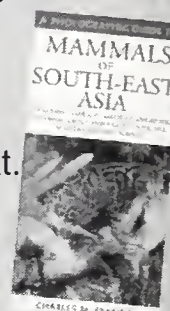


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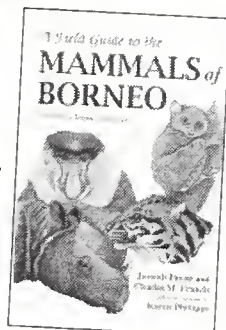
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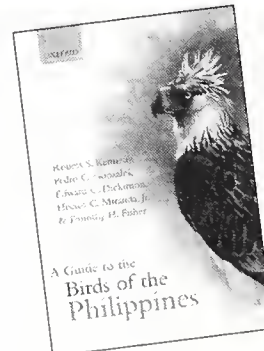
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Field identification of 'Long-billed' Vultures (Indian and Slender-billed Vultures)

The Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus* is generally recognized as having two distinct subspecies, *indicus* and *tenuirostris*.^{1,2,3} However, two of us (PCR and SJP) have reported recently on many differences between these taxa which demonstrate that they are not closely related and should be considered as separate species,^{4,5} for which we recommend the names Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus* and Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris*. The name 'Long-billed Vulture' is used herein only in the old sense, e.g. to refer to both taxa together. Alström⁶ presented fieldmarks for the identification of Asian *Gyps* vultures but treated Long-billed Vulture as a single species; however, he pointed out some differences between the taxa and concluded '...they may prove to be better considered as separate species.' The aim of this article is to provide fieldmarks for the field identification of these two distinct vultures; many of these fieldmarks have not been previously published, but accurate field identification is especially important given the recently documented drastic population declines of both these taxa in many parts of their ranges.⁷

This article supplements Alström's⁶ paper on the field identification of *Gyps* vultures in Asia, so we have adopted a similar format and terminology. However, we prefer to call all species of *Gyps* 'vultures' and reserve the name 'griffon' solely for the species *Gyps fulvus*. Information presented in Alström⁶ will, for the most part, not be restated here.

Distribution

The two species are largely or entirely allopatric, and are presumably resident. The Indian Vulture occurs in Peninsular India south of the Gangetic Plain, barely reaching easternmost Pakistan in the west and extending locally east to at least eastern Madhya Pradesh and south at least to the Nilgiris. The Slender-billed Vulture occurs in the Gangetic Plain from at least western Uttar Pradesh along the base of the Himalayas of India and Nepal, and southward to the Calcutta area and Bangladesh. It was formerly found at least sporadically as far east and south as Vietnam and Malaysia, but has almost disappeared from south-east Asia. It would not be surprising if non-breeding

individuals of both species occasionally overlap in northern India, but this has yet to be demonstrated conclusively.

Description and identification

Indian Vulture

The Indian Vulture is a typical *Gyps* with a long, robust neck, a strong bill, a rounded crown and a regal, aquiline bearing. The feathers of the lower body and undertail-coverts are full, making the lower body appear broad. The outer 'thighs' or tibiae are heavily covered by large buffy contour feathers. Fine hair-like feathers give the crown a pale cast.

Adult perched: The bill and cere are pale yellowish overall. The eyerings of adults are noticeably paler than the blackish surrounding skin and are often tinged pale bluish, as are the cere and gape. The neck ruff is large, fluffy, and white. Body feathers are broad and rounded. The back and upperwing coverts are clean clear buffy, the larger feathers with dark centres giving a broadly scalloped appearance. The blackish neck has pale down on the upper hind neck, while the lower neck may be nearly naked. The talons are pale yellowish, contrasting with the darker toes.

Juvenile perched: The bill is dark with a paler culmen and base. The cere is dark, lightening with age. The pinkish head and neck are completely covered with whitish down. Body feathers are long and pointed. Juveniles are quite distinct from adults in appearance, with their dingy, heavily streaked plumage.

Subadult perched: In appearance between adult and juvenile depending on age, but back and upperwing-coverts are dingier, less streaked than in juvenile and less scalloped than in adult; the bill has irregular dark patches on the sides.

In flight: Trailing edges of the broad wings appear straight and not pinched-in at the body, and Primary 4 is not greatly longer than Primary 3. Lower body and undertail-coverts appear full and wide, and tips of toes fall short of tail-tip. Thighs have heavy feathering concolorous with underparts, so white down does not show up. Undersides of adults' flight feathers have a pale cast and dark tips.

Slender-billed Vulture

The Slender-billed Vulture looks markedly different from other *Gyps*, with its slender neck, thin elongate bill and front of face, and angular crown. The contour feathering on its lower body is loose-textured and sparse, so the lower body appears slender. White down patches on the outer legs are conspicuous because of the relatively small and sparse contour feathers. At any age, the body feathers are elongated and narrow. Perched Slender-billed Vultures appear smaller-headed, larger-eyed, longer-billed, longer-legged, ragged, dingy, and graceless compared to typical *Gyps*. Their eye-rings are dark

and lack contrast with the dark facial skin. Age-for-age, Slender-billed Vultures have much less feathering on the head and neck than do Indian Vultures. A close view shows that the head and neck skin of adult Slender-billed Vultures has thick creases and wrinkles not present in Indian Vultures. The Slender-billed Vulture has large, prominent ear canals that are noticeable even at a distance, unlike the small ones in Indian Vulture and other *Gyps*.

Adult perched: The bill is dark with a pale culmen, and the cere is entirely black. The head and neck appear to lack feathering, and the skin looks uniformly black. The ruff is dirty white and rather

Vulture plate on page 26 by John Schmitt

1. Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris*

- a. Adult in flight. Trailing edge of wings appear rounded and pinched-in at the body, and P4 is noticeably longer than P3. Lower body and base of tail appear narrow, and tips of toes reach tail-tip. Undertail-coverts appear dark and sparse. White cottony flank patches are distinctive, and undersides of flight feathers are uniformly dark.
- b. Juvenile perched. All show long narrow neck; juveniles have some sparse pale down on black hind neck. Juveniles' beaks are dark, often with a small pale line on top. All show downy outer leg feathers.
- c. Adult perched. All show long, rugose, narrow necks; adults' black necks lack pale down. Adults' beaks are dark with pale culmen. Adults' dingy white ruffs appear rather flat and less fluffy, and their backs and upperwing-coverts appear dingy buff. All show downy outer leg feathers.
- d. Juvenile head. All show narrow elongated beaks, angular crowns, and narrow necks. Juveniles have dark beaks, often with a narrow pale area on top and sparse down on black napes and upper necks.
- e. Adult head. All show narrow elongated beaks, angular crowns, and narrow necks. Adults have dark beaks with narrow pale culmens and lack down on black head and neck.
- f. Adult perched. Pale lower back and uppertail-coverts usually show dark centres, and greater secondary upperwing- and uppertail-coverts lack pale tips.

2. Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus*

- a. Adult in flight. Trailing edge of wings appears straight and not pinched-in at the body, and P4 is not greatly longer than P3. Lower body and

undertail-coverts appear full and wide, and tips of toes fall short of tail-tip. Flanks lack white cottony patches, and undersides of flight feathers have a pale cast and dark tips.

- b. Adult perched. All show thick necks; adults show some cottony down. Adults' beaks and ceres are overall pale. Adults' white ruffs appear full and fluffy, and back and upperwing-coverts appear clean buff. Outer leg feathers are not downy. Adults have pale talons.
- c. Juvenile perched. All show thick necks; juveniles' pale necks are completely covered with cottony down. Juveniles' beaks are dark with pale culmen. Outer leg feathers are not downy.
- d. Juvenile head. All show shorter deeper beaks, rounded crowns, and thick necks. Head and pale neck are completely covered with white down, and the beak has a wide pale culmen.
- e. Adult head. All show shorter deeper beaks, rounded crowns, and thick necks. Adults' black necks have some white down, and their ceres and beaks are completely pale. Note the fine hair-like feathers on the crowns.
- f. Older immature perched. Similar to adult, but back and upperwing-coverts are dingy buff, beaks have dark sides, and pale necks have more down and a pinkish area on lower hind neck.
- g. Adult perched. Pale lower back and uppertail-coverts usually lack dark centres, and greater secondary upperwing- and uppertail-coverts have wide pale tips.

3. White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*

- a. Juvenile in flight. Body and underwing-coverts are never as pale as those of Slender-billed and Indian Vultures.
- b. Juvenile perched. Body is darker than those of juvenile Slender-billed and Indian Vultures.
- c. Juvenile perched. Beak is all dark, lacking pale culmen, and down on nape is darker.



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Captions are on page 25



small and ragged. The overall coloration is a somewhat darker and colder brown than in Indian. The back and upperwing-coverts appear dingy and ill-kempt, and although the large feathers have pale edgings, these are narrower and irregular and do not give a clear scalloped pattern. The talons are dark.

Juvenile perched: The bill is dark, often with a small pale area on the culmen. The head and neck are black with some fine white down on the nape and upper neck. Juveniles are quite similar to adults except for their pale-streaked upperparts and downier heads and necks.

Subadult perched: Intermediate between juveniles and adults, and tending to be even more ragged and dingy in plumage than adults.

In flight: The trailing edges of the wings appear rounded and strongly pinched-in at the body, and Primary 4 is noticeably longer than Primary 3. The lower body and base of tail appear narrow, and the toe tips reach the tail-tip. The undertail-coverts are dark and sparse. The white downy thigh patches form a distinctive 'V' against the darker underparts. The undersides of the flight feathers are uniformly dark.

Related information

Although these vultures look somewhat similar to one another in overall colour and size, they are

surprisingly easy and straightforward to distinguish in any plumage, whether standing or in flight. A major reason for the previous confusion regarding the identification of Long-billed Vultures is that very few criteria useful in separating them from other *Gyps* apply to both taxa. Among these are the narrower, more elongate bills of both species than in White-backed Vultures. Also, juveniles of both species have similar pale shaft-streaks to the upperparts and paler underparts, unlike young White-backed Vultures, which are somewhat darker above and much darker below with sharp pale streaks.

In general appearance, adult Indian Vultures are reminiscent of the much larger Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, with which it has been confused in the past.⁷ The criteria listed in Alström⁶ are sufficient for their differentiation. In contrast, Slender-billed Vultures are highly distinctive in proportions and carriage, and do not closely resemble any other species. Nevertheless, they may be confused with other brown *Gyps*, especially immature White-backed Vultures, by observers with inadequate reference material or experience.

Many additional characters (e.g. in feather shape and structure, tarsal scutellation, osteology, egg shape, nestling plumages, nesting habits, etc.) that differ between the two taxa are not mentioned further herein as they have little relevance to field

Captions for plate on page 27

All photos by W. S. Clark

- 1 Adult Indian Vulture. Trailing edges of wings appear straight and are not pinched-in at the body and P4 is not greatly longer than P3 on all Indian Vultures. Lower body and undertail coverts appear full and wide, and tips of toes fall short of tail-tip. Flanks lack white cottony patches, and undersides of adults' flight feathers have a pale cast and dark tips. (India, Nov.)
- 2 Adult Slender-billed Vulture. Trailing edges of wings appear rounded and pinched-in at the body and P4 is noticeably longer than P3 on all Slender-billed Vultures. Lower body and base of tail appear narrow, and tips of toes reach tail-tip. Undertail-coverts appear sparse. White cottony flank patches are distinctive, and undersides of flight feathers are uniformly dark. (India, Nov.)
- 3 Adult Indian Vulture. Adults' thick necks show some cottony down. Their beaks and ceres are overall pale, their white ruffs appear full and fluffy, and back and upperwing-coverts appear clean buff. Outer leg feathers are not downy. Adults have pale talons. (India, Dec.)
- 4 Adult Slender-billed Vulture. Adults' long, rugose, narrow necks are black and lack pale down. Their beaks are dark with pale culmen, their dingy white ruffs appear rather flat and less fluffy, and their backs and upperwing-coverts appear dingy buff. All Slender-billed Vultures show downy outer leg feathers. (India, Nov.)
- 5 Adult Indian Vulture. Round bare chest patches are noticeable. (India, March.)
- 6 Adult Slender-billed Vulture (Right). Smaller bare chest patches are less noticeable than in other *Gyps*. (India, March.)
- 7 Juvenile Indian Vulture. Juveniles' thick necks are pale, and their crowns and necks are completely covered with cottony down. Their beaks are dark with pale culmen. (India, March.)
- 8 Juvenile Slender-billed Vulture. Juveniles' long narrow necks are black and have some sparse pale down on hind neck. Their beaks are dark, often with a small pale line on top, and they show downy outer leg feathers. (India, Dec.)

identification. We have seen no evidence for intergradation between Slender-billed and Indian Vultures, and believe it is unlikely that two such different birds would interbreed.

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Pamela C. Rasmussen, Division of Birds, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. 20560 and Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, MI 48824 USA

William S. Clark, 7800, Dasset Court, Apt. 101, Annandale, VA 22003 USA

Steven James Parry, Bird Group, Department of Zoology, The Natural History Museum, Tring, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom.

John Schmitt, P. O. Box 9, Wofford Heights, CA 93285 USA

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Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* in Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve, Nepal

Abstract: A ten-day survey to assess the population status of Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* in Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (RSRW), Nepal, was carried out between 5–14 May, 2000. Using a method involving the counting of lekking sites and identification of territories a total of 12 floricans (10 adult males/2 subadults) was recorded. No hens were recorded. Based on the present survey, probably no more than 30 Bengal Floricans remain in RSWR. Uncontrolled fire, predators and invasion of saplings were recorded as the major threats to the birds. Recommendations regarding proper management of grassland, control of predators and utilisation of awareness campaigns were made. Since the knowledge of this species' ecology is largely incomplete, maintaining a healthy population in all suitable habitat is the most crucial aspect of the conservation strategy for this species.

(This survey work was carried out with the assistance of an OBC Small Grant)

Introduction

The Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* is included in the endangered species list of the IUCN Red Data Book, Appendix I of CITES and is one of the nine protected birds under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act (1973) of His Majesty's Government of Nepal. It has a narrow distribution range and occurs only in the Indian Subcontinent and Indochina.¹ The known population of fewer than 300–400 individuals puts it at serious risk from further habitat loss, warranting inclusion in the ICBP (now BirdLife International) list of endangered species.²

In 1982, the then ICBP initiated a preliminary study of the status, distribution, ecology and behaviour of the Bengal Floricans to gather the information that was lacking. In Nepal, the survey located 35–50 floricans distributed between five sites: Royal Chitwan National Park (RCNP), Royal Bardia National Park (RBNP), Royal

Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (RSWR), Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve (KTWR) and an unprotected area near Koshi Barrage in the east of the country.³ The Koshi Barrage site appears to have lost its small population since 1980 following a change in the course of the river during the monsoon. There has been only one confirmed record from KTWR since 1986, a single in 1989.² There has been no record from KTWR since 1990. Considering the present situation, it is unlikely that Bengal Florican still occurs in the grasslands of KTWR.

At present, RCNP, RBNP and RSWR are the three prime areas for floricans. Of the three, RSWR holds the largest population of Bengal Floricans. Since no information had been available for a relatively lengthy time, this study attempted to assess the present population status of Bengal Florican in RSWR. During the study a total of 12 floricans (10 adult males/ 2 subadults) was recorded. Based on this present study, probably



Figure 1: Map showing location of Royal Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve

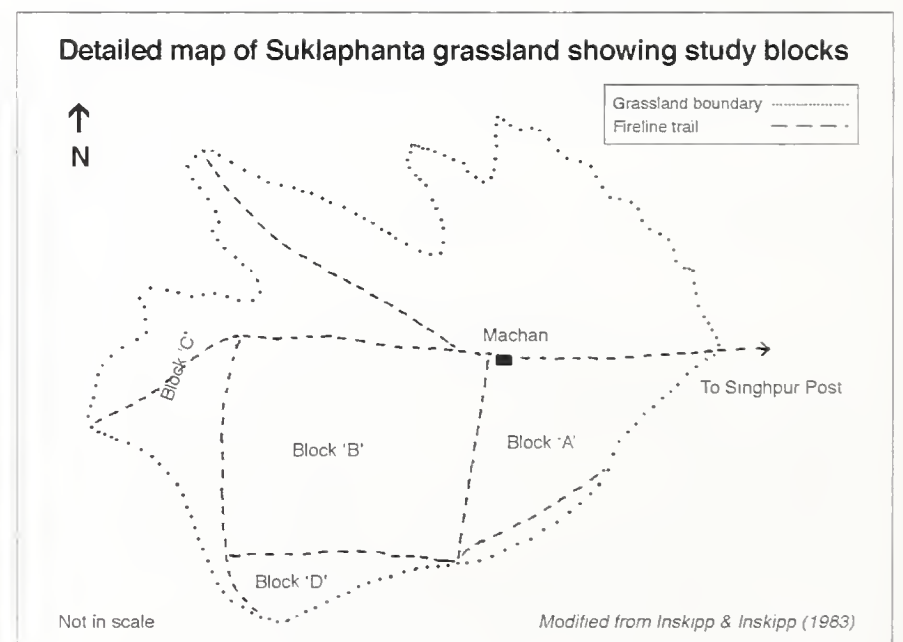


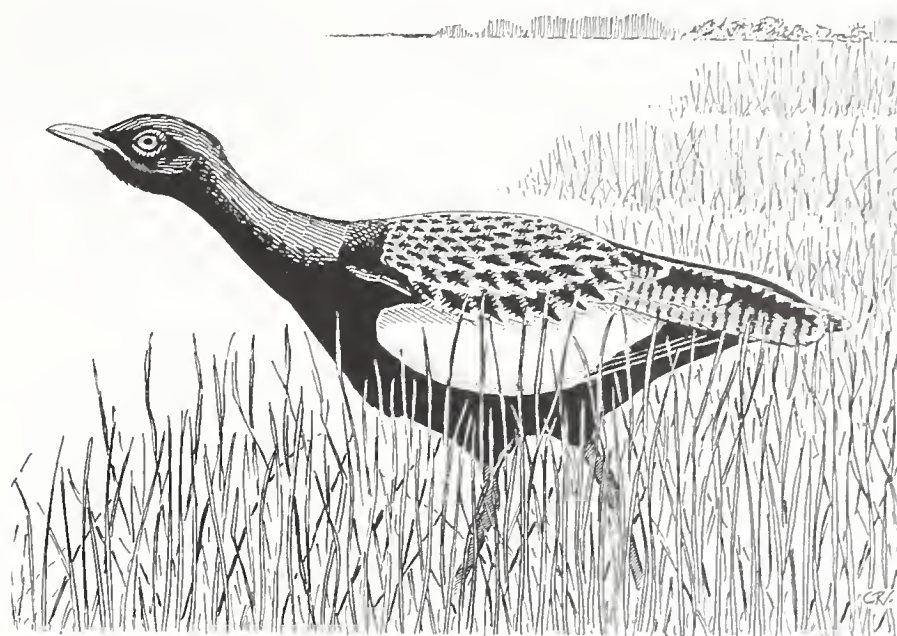
Figure 2: Map showing location of study blocks

no more than 30 Bengal Floricans are estimated to remain in RSWR.

RSWR (80°25'E 28°35'N) is situated in the extreme south-west of Nepal and occupies an area of 305 km² (Fig 1). The reserve has a subtropical climate with more than 90% of the annual precipitation coming in the monsoon season between mid-June and September. There are two other distinct seasons: hot-dry from February to mid-June and cool-dry from late September to mid-February. Vegetation in the reserve is mainly Sal forest with other vegetation types such as Khair-Sisso forest, grassland and marshy areas. It is a home for endangered fauna such as swamp deer *Cervus duvauceli*, Asian elephant *Elephas maximus*, and tiger *Panthera tigris*. A total of 268 species of birds has been recorded in the reserve, with Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* and Swamp Francolin *Francolin gularis* among the threatened birds.

Methodology

The Bengal Florican is a lekking species⁴ most active in the early mornings and evenings;¹ hence observation was carried out in the early morning (06h30–10h00) and late afternoon (16h30–19h00). Important florican habitats were visited during the breeding season when the territorial males were more visible than usual owing to their aerial display. Bustards are very territorial during the breeding season,^{5,6,7} thus the location of a territory, i.e. display site of a male, was the basis of the count of individual males. As hens are not so easy to locate the population estimate is based on the assumption of an equal sex ratio. Surveying was carried out at four sites: Suklaphanta, Singhpur, Karaiya phanta and Haraiya phanta. The most extensive of these, Suklaphanta, was the focus of the survey. This site was divided into four blocks, using firelines as borders (Fig 2). Observation was carried out with binoculars from the *machan* (tower hide used by hunters) enabling extensive viewing of the grassland, generally with minimal disturbance to floricans. The number of floricans seen, their sex, activity, time, weather and time spent in each area were all noted, together with a general impression of the habitat. Since there was some overlapping of territories – probably because it was toward the end of the breeding season – we relied on the lowest count for calculating the population. The highest number of floricans recorded within a short span of time with the greatest spatial distribution between them was referred as the least count.



Bengal Florican *Houbaropsis bengalensis* by Craig Robson (Courtesy of Birdquest)

Results and Discussion

Population status: Of the total of 12 floricans (10 adult males / 2 sub-adults) recorded the highest number of males recorded at a single place was six. Only two males had distinct territories, one in block 'A' and the other in block 'C'. Other males wandered from one block to another. Most of the records were of birds in flight or displaying, with sightings of two males in the air at the same time being the most frequent observation. On a few occasions, four males were seen in flight at the same time. Female floricans were not recorded in this study because of the height of the grass and their elusive behaviour. The presence of sub-adults was taken to imply that breeding was more or less successful. Taking account of the circumstances, we assumed that the population there had remained stable.

Suklaphanta is the prime habitat of Bengal Florican and the ten adult males and two sub-adults recorded in the current study compare with 13 males recorded by Inskipp and Inskipp³ and 11 males by Weaver.² A few adult males may have been overlooked due to the grass being tall enough to impede the sighting of floricans. Encroachment by *Grewia* spp. was severe. No floricans were recorded during our brief visit to Karaiya phanta but park officials and game scouts have reported two males displaying at this site and Weaver² recorded three adult males here. On one occasion, two males flew south-east from Suklaphanta over the trees in the direction of Karaiya phanta, so it is strongly suspected that Karaiya phanta does in fact hold a small number of birds. However, the phanta was overgrazed by domestic cattle and tall grasses were dominant, which left little room for suitable habitat for floricans. At present, Haraiya and Singhpur

Table 1: Site surveyed, search effort and no. of florican recorded in RSWR.

Site	No. of days	No. of visits	Total time spent (Hrs)	Male	Female	Sub-adult
Sukla phanta	6	11	33	10	-	2
Singhpur phanta	2	4	12	-	-	-
Karaiya phanta	1	2	3	2(report)	-	-
Haraiya phanta	1	2	4	-	-	-
Total	10	19	52	10	0	2

phantas do not hold any floricans. If managed sympathetically, these two phantas could serve as habitat for the floricans.

Threats to the floricans

Three factors, uncontrolled fire, predators and the invasion of saplings, were recorded as major threats to the floricans. As Suklaphanta is situated away from human settlement, thatch is not harvested, making the area susceptible to outbreaks of fire in the dry season. Controlled burning by park management was not observed. Even in the first week of May, some patches of grassland were burning. This ultimately had an adverse effect as the burning of grassland coincided with the breeding period of the floricans. We frequently encountered three to four golden jackals *Canis aureus* (and on one occasion six) and good numbers of wild boar *Sus scrofa* at Suklaphanta. The high density of these animals is thought to be having an adverse effect on chick and egg numbers of the floricans. The advanced succession of grassland was yet another threat as grass species were gradually being replaced by shrub species with *Grewia* being the main culprit. This invasion of saplings and tall grasses is reducing the density of the grass species preferred by floricans.

Awareness of the floricans

Most of the game scouts, elephant caretakers and local people did not have any knowledge of floricans and we were surprised to hear that they had never actually seen the species. Despite this fact a few game scouts and elephant caretakers

had had a chance to gain some knowledge of the birds and, moreover, had actually observed the birds.

The recorded population of 12 floricans was lower than that of previous studies. Comparison with these studies leads us to conclude that the population of Bengal Florican is slowly dwindling rather than being maintained. Even if the population at RSRW remains stable it still poses serious threats to floricans in the long run from inbreeding. Hitherto, there is no evidence that Bengal Floricans are migratory. So, gene exchange between populations and recolonisation of deserted sites will be unlikely. Furthermore, we don't have any idea about the population size required for long-term survival. Therefore maintaining the healthy population in all current habitats is the most crucial part of the conservation strategy for this species. Annual harvesting of grass and prescribed burning at the beginning of the dry season are the most important and vital management strategies needed if the grassland is to be maintained in a suitable state for floricans. Grass burning benefits the birds by opening up areas suitable for use as display grounds, and the species certainly shows a liking for areas which have been recently burned.³ Also, it has been suggested that regular burning or heavy grazing in Nepal actually encourages the growth of *Imperata cylindrica*, the fire-resistant species, at the expense of taller grasses.⁸ Although the long-term ecological effects of controlled burning of grasslands are poorly understood, it does appear to have beneficial effects for this species. To reverse the succession of grassland the felling of some trees present on the northern side of Suklaphanta has been

Table 2: Bengal Floricans recorded at RSWR over two decades.

Source	Adult male	Female	Sub-adult	Total
Inskipp & Inskipp, 1983 ³	12	2	1	15
Weaver, 1991 ²	14 (inc. sub-adult)	3	-	17
Present study, 2000	10	-	2	12

undertaken, although weeding of *Grewia*, which is urgently required, has not yet taken place. Phantas in the neighbourhood of human settlement are suffering from harmful human activities: Haraiya phanta and Karaiya phanta have both lost suitable florican habitat through overgrazing. If the present trend continues, it is likely that the few floricans present in the area will soon disappear due to the species' low tolerance of disturbance.

Recommendations

For proper maintenance of grassland, thatch grasses should be harvested before the breeding season and the prescribed burning of grassland should be undertaken. All grassland management practices should be carried out in the two or three months on either side of the breeding season. Overgrazing and disturbance at grasslands in the vicinity of human settlement need to be controlled and the invasion of saplings and tall grasses should be checked. The weeding of *Grewia* needs to be implemented immediately. People's awareness of the species needs to be raised and, whenever possible, people should be informed about different aspects of florican behaviour. Advanced research techniques such as radiotelemetry should be used to study the movement of floricans outside the breeding season to improve knowledge of the species' ecology during this period of their life-cycle. Yearly monitoring of florican population in all prime habitat should be carried out if possible.

Acknowledgements

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Nabin Baral, Nilesh Timilsina and Bijay Tamang, PO Box 907, Kathmandu, Nepal



Yellow-eyed Pigeon from Meerut district
of Uttar Pradesh, India (page 36)

- 1 Yellow-eyed Pigeon *Columba eversmanni*
- 2 Yellow-eyed Pigeon *C. eversmanni* (top) and
Rock Pigeon *C. livia*
- 3 Yellow-eyed Pigeon *C. eversmanni* (bottom) and
Rock Pigeon *C. livia*

All photos by Rajat Bhargava

Rediscovery of the Damar Flycatcher (page 38)

- 4 Damar Flycatcher *Ficedula henrici* by Colin
Trainor.



Birdwatching Areas: Asan Barrage and adjoining Sal forests of Timli (page 42)

5 Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*

6 Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*

7 Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*

8 Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*

All photos by Tim Loseby

Ornithological records from Luzon (page 40)

9 Luzon Rail *Lewinia mirificus*, Mount Data, Luzon, 29 Jan 2001. Photo by Vladimir Dinets. This photo is a record of the first-ever sighting in the wild of this species.

Record of Yellow-eyed Pigeon *Columba eversmanni* from Meerut district of Uttar Pradesh, India

English names: Pale-backed Pigeon, Pale-backed Eastern Stock Dove, Eversmann's Stock Dove and Eastern Stock Dove.

Vernacular names: Baghai kabutar, Pahari Kabutar (Uttar Pradesh), Bagar, Ban parawa (Bihar), Salara Kabutar, Kamar Kular (Punjab).

The Yellow-eyed Pigeon *Columba eversmanni* is a globally threatened species listed as Vulnerable by Collar *et al.*¹ and also protected under Schedule IV of the Indian (Wildlife) Protection Act, 1972. It is found in the deserts and settled regions of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, southern Kazakhstan and Afghanistan (one record from Tibet, China) into riverine plains and fields in western Pakistan and northern India.¹ It is a winter visitor and passage migrant, chiefly to Pakistan and northern India – recorded in Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab (Ludhiana and Ambala dists.) Uttar Pradesh (Lucknow and Gorakhpur dists.), east to Bihar (Dharbhanga) and south to North Madhya Pradesh.²⁻⁴

On 3 January 1998, I examined a trapped individual, netted that same afternoon from the village of Abdulapur, about 5 km from Meerut. The town of Meerut itself is about 70 km north of Delhi in Uttar Pradesh district, northern India (Fig 1). It has a resident population of about 50 professional bird trappers, of which 15–20 people trap Rock Pigeons *Columba livia* on a daily basis for the table. A single Yellow-eyed Pigeon was caught along with a few Rock Pigeons, using a clap-net. Following close examination and comparison of the specimen with plates in Ali & Ripley² and also with a specimen of Rock Pigeon, I confirmed its identity as a Yellow-eyed Pigeon (Photos 1–3 on page 34). The pale greyish-white back, yellowish iris and orbital skin, combined with a distinctly yellow tip to the bill³ and smaller size than Rock were diagnostic. The dove was shown to me with one side of its primaries plucked off; it could not therefore be released back to the wild. It was kept in a large aviary by an experienced bird keeper and lived for at least two years – it may indeed still survive today. When

last observed the bird was in a seemingly very healthy condition and readily fed on a mixture of millet, paddy, wheat and mulberry fruit. The bird was silent in the aviary, though its call was listened for during June, the breeding period of the species. This individual is most likely a female as evident from the displays of courtship behaviour towards it of its companion – a known male Rock Pigeon.

According to Ali & Ripley,² the Yellow-eyed Pigeon's habits are similar to those of Rock Pigeons: they forage in open, cultivated country in small parties or flocks, often in the company of Rock Pigeons in the morning and afternoons. They roost in groves of poplar, mango and babool trees. On 4 January 1998, along with the trapper, I visited Abdulapur village to see the habitat. The site was a harvested paddy field with few mango and *Zizyphus* trees, fitting Ali & Ripley's habitat description.

The common and widespread Rock Pigeon is excluded from the animals listed in the Indian (Wildlife) Protection Act, 1972 and probably partly as a result of this prominently figures in the local bird trade.⁵ After becoming aware of the

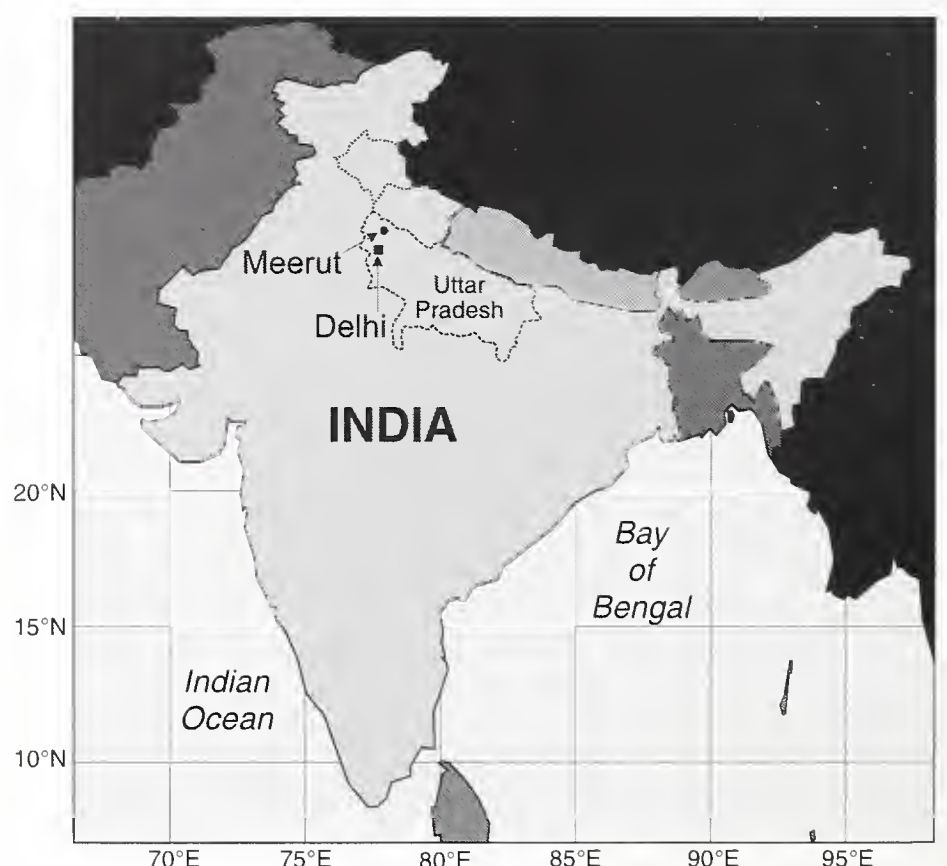


Figure 1: Map showing location of Meerut

Recent sightings of Yellow-eyed Pigeon include large numbers reported from Jodhpur in Rajasthan in the winter of 1997–98 (Shantanu kumar *in litt.* to BNHS) and several in Harike, Punjab (Robson,⁶ Harkirat Sangha, pers. comm. 1999). However there is a great concern about the dramatic decline in Central Asia in recent years and the reasons remain unknown.¹ Old time *shikaris* had cautioned the alarming disappearance of this species in Ludhiana, where it was once common in 1950.⁷ Roberts⁸ reports the status of these species in Pakistan as scarce. A proper study and monitoring of this species would help to reveal its true status.

Length: 300 mm Wing: 200 mm Bill: 18 mm
Tarsus: 29 mm Tail: 98 mm

I am grateful to Dr. Asad R. Rahmani, Director, Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai, for his valuable comments, technical input and support of the article. I thank Dr. Amita Khurana, a birdkeeper from Meerut, for devoting her time to the care of the dove. Last but not least, I would like to thank the bird trappers for sharing their experiences with me and for their help.

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*Rajat Bhargava, 101, Naya Bazar Sadar, Meerut Cantt,
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Rediscovery of the Damar Flycatcher *Ficedula henrici*, Damar Island, Maluku, Indonesia

In the Banda Sea, 1,800 km east of Jakarta, the tiny island of Damar (198 km²) harbours one of Indonesia's 381 endemic birds: the Damar Flycatcher *Ficedula henrici* is found nowhere else in the world, another example of Indonesia's remarkable megadiversity. It is a small (12 cm) dark-blue flycatcher with a white eyestripe and small white chest patch (see photo on page 34). The highly limited global range on an explosive volcanic island, coupled with a total lack of information on the status of the island's forests, led BirdLife International to class this species as Vulnerable in their recently published *Threatened Birds of Asia*.

It was discovered and collected in 1898 by Heinrich Kühn, a museum specimen collector, and until now had not been seen since. For three months, Kühn and his team of Javanese assistants collected bird specimens for the British Museum, their job to characterise the bird species composition of some of the most remote islands

of Indonesia. In particular they sought species previously unknown to science. Only 49 species were collected including nine flycatcher specimens, presumably from forest, because the island at this time was described as 'almost entirely covered in dense forest'.

After more than two weeks travelling to the island from Java, Colin Trainor of BirdLife International and Clemens Bulurdity, a PKA Conservation Officer (from Saumlaki, Tanimbar Islands), rediscovered the Damar Flycatcher during an ornithological survey in August and September 2001. The species was found in tropical semi-evergreen forest near the villages of Wulur, Kumur and Batumerah – roughly in the same localities as specimens collected 103 years previously.

Clemens successfully captured two males and a female with mist nets, using skills he had developed during previous BirdLife surveys of the Tanimbar Islands. The Damar Flycatcher was

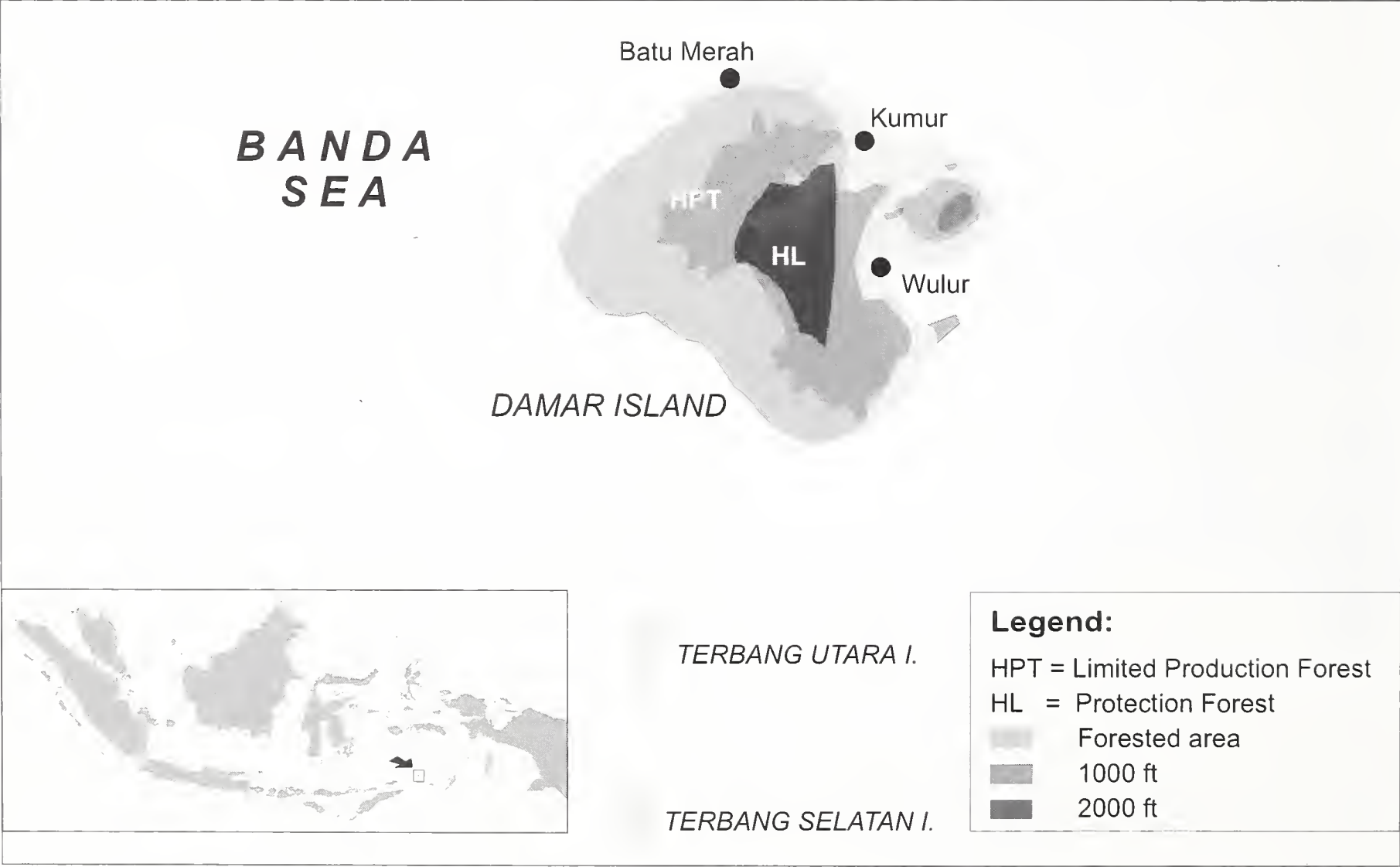


Figure 1: Location of Damar Island, Indonesia

photographed for the first time ever, measured and released. It was infrequently observed; however once its call was learnt it was one of the more frequently recorded forest birds. It prefers the rattan-dominated forest understorey where it searches for insects on tree trunks, from leaf litter, rocks and shrubs. Occasionally it enters vegetable garden plots that are surrounded by primary forest, where it searches for grubs on chilli bushes and bananas. With more than 70% of the island still covered in forest and the relatively low-level pressure on forest from agricultural clearance and small-scale logging, the Damar Flycatcher is in no immediate danger of becoming extinct. Given its small size and rather weak and ordinary song it is of little interest to local people either as a food item or as a tradable commodity. Some old men know it as *Lwoto Lwoto*, but the younger men class it as just another small forest bird, little different from a fantail *Rhipidura* sp.

The survey added 13 other birds to Damar's short list, including the Barred-necked Cuckoo-dove *Macropygia magna* – one of 15 restricted-range species known from the island. The survey also provided the first updated information from Damar in 103 years on other interesting species such as the Blue-streaked Lory *Eos reticulata*, Olive-headed Lorikeet *Trichoglossus euteles*, Cinnamon-collared Kingfisher *Todiramphus australasia* and Green-cheeked Bronze-cuckoo *Chrysococcyx rufomerus*.

Jeni Shannaz, BirdLife International-Indonesia Programme, P.O. Box 310/Boo, Boopr, Indonesia
For further details contact : juliesl@burung.org or jshannaz@burung.org

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Ornithological records from Luzon during January–February 2001, including a description of the voice of Luzon Rail *Lewinia mirificus*

Mount Data (2,310 m) in northern Luzon is well known to mammalogists as the most important area of rodent endemism on the Philippines¹ but despite its accessibility, it is rarely visited by ornithologists. The area above Mount Data Hotel has well-preserved pine forests, and some remnants of oak-dominated cloud forests. In January 2001, three nights were spent at elevations of 2,200–2,300 m, in an attempt (successful) to observe some endemic rodents. Probably due to unusually high rodent densities, four species of owl were found to be abundant in cloud forests of the area: Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata*, Luzon Scops Owl *Otus longicornis*, Philippine Scops Owl *O. megalotis*, and Philippine Eagle Owl *Bubo philippinensis*. These observations may set new altitudinal records for the latter two species, normally found below 1,500 m.²

At 06h10, 29 January, a small, long-billed rail was observed and photographed (see page 35) in degraded cloud forest near the edge of a recently ploughed field, at approximately 2,240 m elevation. Its call, heard twice, was an accelerating 2–3 second-long series of clicking notes, easily imitated by tapping an empty matchbox with a fingernail (the bird did not respond to this imitation), and sounding more like a frog than a bird. The rail was dark grey, with a brownish tint on the upperparts (this does not show well on the photo), white barring on a black belly, whitish throat and greyish-brown crown, nape and upper neck. In general appearance and movements, it resembled a small, dark Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus*. It was identified as a Luzon Rail *Lewinia mirificus*, a little-known species never before observed in the wild.^{2–5} It differed from the illustration in Taylor⁴ in having a slightly more pronounced pale eyebrow and less regular barring on the belly, and from the illustration in Kennedy *et al.*² in not having visible barring on the upperparts. Its voice matched the description⁴ of Lewin's Rail *L. pectoralis*, an allopatric (possibly conspecific) bird from the Australo-Papuan Region.

At 18h30 on the same day, a small, reddish-breasted buttonquail was briefly observed in low grass at the edge of park-like pine forest near Mount Data Hotel, at 2,226 m. There was a possibility of its being an extremely rare and little-known Worcester's Buttonquail *Turnix worcesteri*, believed to be a highland species.⁶ Unfortunately, poor light conditions did not allow exact identification, although the similar species, Small Buttonquail *T. sylvatica*, was less likely to occur at this elevation as it is predominantly a lowland species in the Philippines² while Spotted Buttonquail *T. ocellata*, a more common highland species, is larger and more brightly coloured.⁶

Among other bird species found on Mount Data, the following were worth mentioning: Montane Racquet-tail *Prioniturus montanus*, Whitehead's Swiftlet *Collocalia whiteheadi*, Whiskered Pitta *Pitta kochi*, and Long-billed Rhabdornis *Rhabdornis grandis*. A group of at least 20 Whitehead's Swiftlets was also observed at a mountain pass (2,220 m) near the village of Catubo, which is locally known as The Highest Point, being the highest point of the Philippine highway system. This species was previously known on Luzon only from Mount Data.² The identification of the birds as Whitehead's Swiftlets was based on the following features: large size (approaching House Swift *Apus nipalensis* in visual appearance); forked tail (unlike in Grey-rumped Swiftlet *C. marginata*); darker upperparts and paler underparts than in the much smaller Philippine Swiftlet *C. mearnsi* and in the slightly smaller Grey Swiftlet *C. amelis*; flight very fast and with few turns, resembling *Apus* swifts rather than other *Collocalia* species (Whitehead's, Grey, and Grey-rumped Swiftlets were all observed together at The Highest Point, while Whitehead's, Philippine and Grey-rumped were observed together at Mt. Data).

Mayon Volcano (2462 m) in southern Luzon has vegetation similar to the better-studied Mount Isarog, but is more accessible, having a paved road leading to Mayon Vista Lodge (911 m). On 5 February, a Short-crested Monarch *Hypothymus*

helenae, normally a bird of lowland or even coastal forest², was observed in a dry rocky ravine at 1,050 m elevation, in degraded cloud forest. At 04h30 of the next day, well before dawn, a call identical to that given by the Luzon Rail was heard at the upper edge of the forest at 1,100 m elevation. Other birds worth mentioning at this site were Philippine Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx melanurus*, seen at the same location as the monarch, and Whiskered Pitta, seen directly above Mayon Vista Lodge.

Acknowledgements

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Birdwatching Areas

Asan Barrage and adjoining Sal forests of Timli: Dehra Dun valley, northern India



Introduction

Flanked by dense tropical moist deciduous Sal *Shorea robusta* forests rising on the Shiwalik mountains to its south, lies the little-known Asan Barrage, a nascent birdwatchers paradise. It was constructed in 1967 at the confluence (30°26'N and 77°40'E) of the River Asan and a discharge channel of the River Yamuna to generate hydroelectric power and store water for irrigation. Its reservoir is the largest wetland (ca.3.5 km²) in the entire Dehra Dun valley and attracts more than 86 species¹⁻⁶ of resident and migratory birds. These include 54% of north Indian waterfowl⁶ and up to 32 species⁵ of winter migrants – some from as far away as the Palaearctic region. These birds usually migrate over the Dehra Dun valley and on to other wetlands in the Indo-Gangetic plains and the Himalayan Terai.

IUCN Red Listed⁶ bird species occurring at the site include Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* (Near Threatened), Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* (Near Threatened), Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* (Vulnerable), Darter *Anhinga melanogaster* (Near Threatened), Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* (Vulnerable), and Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* (Near Threatened). Other species of note recorded include Asian Openbill *Anastomus oscitans*, and Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* although these two are scarce. Rare winter visitors have included Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*⁴ and Falcated Duck *Anas falcata*,^{2,7} both since 1991. Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, Greylag Goose *Anser anser* and Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* use the site as a regular staging post during passage migration. Pallas's Fish Eagle, Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecillorhyncha* and Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* breed regularly. During the peak season more than 4,000 ducks (>2,000 Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*) have been counted at Asan Barrage.

Location

The Asan Barrage lies 38 km west of Dehra Dun city, the capital of the newly formed Uttranchal State in northern India (Figs 1 and 2). Dehra Dun

itself is 225 km north of Delhi and is linked to it by road (7–8 h), rail (5–10 h) and a bi-weekly air service (1.5–2 h) with Vayudoot Air from Delhi to Jolly Grant, 23 km east of Dehra Dun city. Rail is the transport of choice with the fastest train, the Shatabadi Express, leaving New Delhi Station at 07h00 and reaching Dehra Dun city by 12h40. From the bus stand at Dehra Dun (1 km from the railway station) you can take a taxi to Asan Barrage (45-minute drive) or a bus to Paonta Sahib which is 7 km further from Asan Barrage.

Accommodation

Upon arrival it is preferable to stay at Dehra Dun, where a large number of good hotels (Drona, Madhuban, Great Value, Ajanta, and Surubhi Palace) are available at reasonable prices, and then proceed to Asan Barrage early morning the following day. Also, Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam Ltd. (GMVN), a state government enterprise, with its headquarters (74/1 Rajpur Road) and public relations office (45, Gandhi Road; Tel:91-0135-653309/654371/652794; e-mail: gmvn@nda.vsnl.net.in) in Dehra Dun and also



Figure 1. Map showing location of Asan Barrage

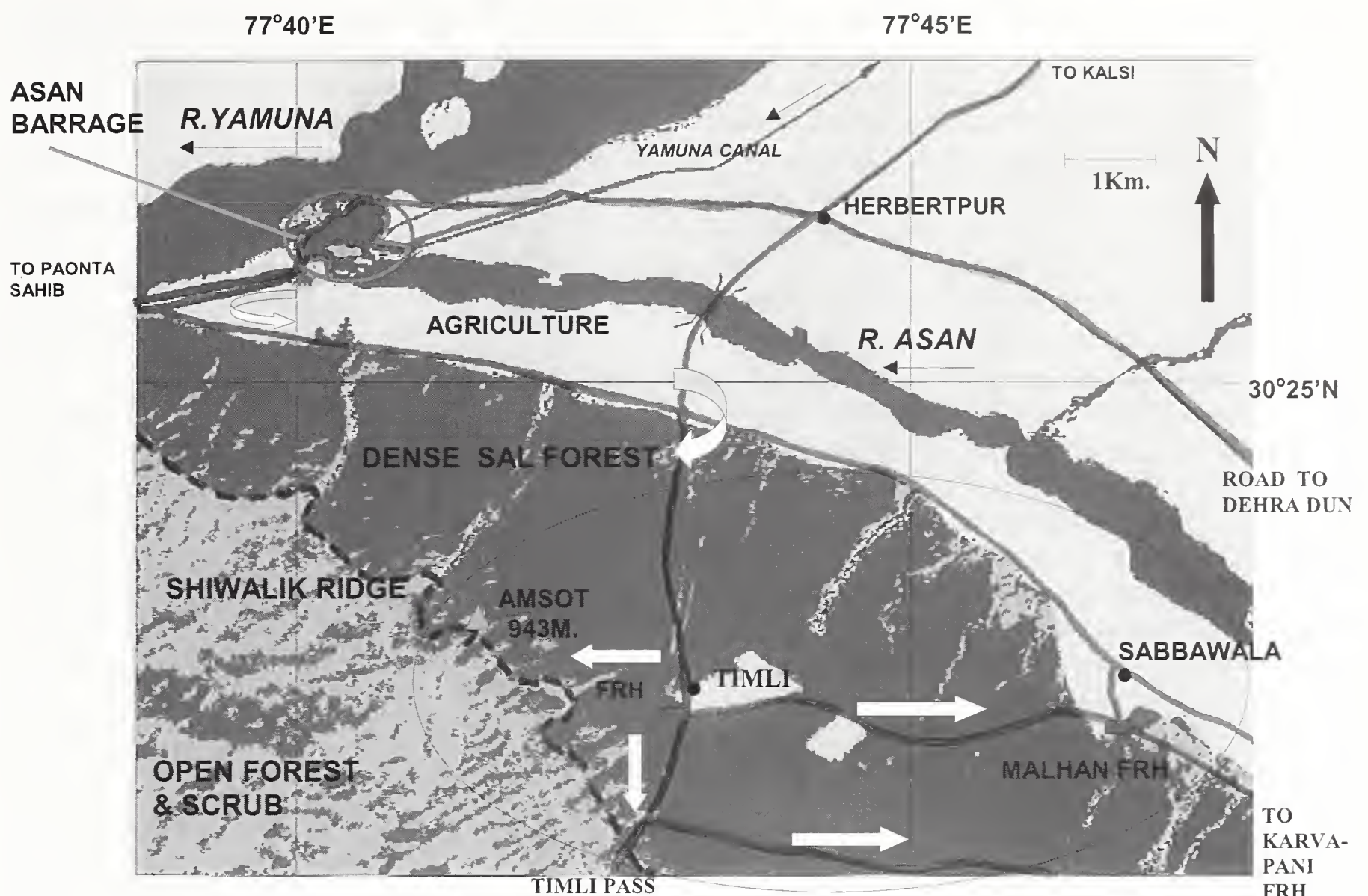


Figure 2. Map showing Asan Barrage and its environs

in New Delhi (Tel: 91-011-3350481; Fax: 91-11-3327713) organises tailor-made birdwatching tours from Dehra Dun to Asan Barrage. This includes the cost of transportation, accommodation, food and guides. Accommodation at Asan Barrage is available for 25 persons in wooden log-huts [dormitories (US\$1.25/night) and 4 deluxe suites (US\$10.0/night)] and fast food is available in a snack-bar restaurant, all situated at one end of the barrage (Tel: 91-01360-22133). Peddle boats, rowing boats and Kayaks (US\$1.05/hour) are also available and can be taken into shallow marshy waters allowing spectacular views of ducks. The disadvantage of staying at Asan Barrage itself is that in spring or summer when it gets extremely hot in the afternoon one can only birdwatch in the morning or evening. Additionally, lunch and dinner are not available at the barrage and one has to go to Paonta Sahib (nearby), where good food is available in hotels and restaurants. Alternatively, carry food or return to Dehra Dun.

Another attraction at the barrage is a small mixed dry deciduous woodland adjoining the northwestern end of the barrage which has a small forest guesthouse (Van Chetna Kendra,

Rampur Mandi) with its northern side descending onto the banks of the River Yamuna from where one can reach the river-bed. The adjacent agricultural fields, the Yamuna Canal and Sal forests of the Timli forest range (10 km to the south) are other sites of interest to birdwatchers.

Strategy

The best time to visit the Asan Barrage is in the winter (late November to February) when most of the winter visitors are present. Passage migrants can be observed here from late February to early April and again from October to November. Summer migrants can be observed alongside breeding residents from April to August. Two to three days at the barrage and adjoining areas is usually enough to find most of the specialties. Warm clothing is necessary in winter and it gets very hot from late April to August. Monsoon rainfall floods the reservoir and marshes from July to early September. Having one's own transport is advantageous. A taxi can be hired from Dehra Dun to Asan Barrage and Timli Dun (US\$20–25/day).

Birds

Winter

One of the greatest attractions during the winter is watching the rare Pallas's Fish Eagle preying almost daily on the Ruddy Shelduck that congregate here. The silence of the lake is disturbed several times during the day as the eagle hunts for ducks. An occupied nest of Pallas's Fish Eagle has been present here for the last 30 years on a *Bombax cieba* tree. It is located in the north-western part (marshes) 20 m from the barrage, near the road. Other raptors commonly seen over the lake are the Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* and Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*, Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhyncus*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Shikra *Accipiter badius*, Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*, Greater Spotted Eagle and Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus* have also been recorded.

The Ruddy Shelduck is the commonest duck on the lake but other species commonly seen include Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*, Common Pochard *A. ferina*, Red-crested Pochard *Rhodonessa rufina*, Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Northern Pintail *A. acuta*, Gadwall *A. strepera*, Mallard *A. platyrhynchos* and Northern Shoveler *A. clypeata*. Amongst these flocks, Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* and Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* can also be seen. Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, Garganey *Anas querquedula* and Cotton Pygmy-goose *Nettapus coromandelianus* are considerably scarcer. Basking on top of long concrete platforms on the support pillars of the barrage can be seen Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Little Cormorant *P. niger*, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii*, Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Ruddy Shelduck, and Spot-billed Duck. Wallcreeper *Tichodroma muraria* is often found hunting for insects on these pillars. The barrage bridge leading to the road on the south-western bank of the lake is the best place to study and photograph all these species.

On the other side of the bridge, from where the excess water from the reservoir is drained through the barrage gates, many cube-shaped concrete boulders are present on the riverbed and electricity wires run overhead. This is the best spot to view Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, Crested Kingfisher *Megaceryle lugubris*, Pied Kingfisher

Ceryle rudis, River Lapwing, Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*, Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*, Streak-throated Swallow *Hirundo fluviicola*, Wire-tailed Swallow *H. smithii*, Barn Swallow *H. rustica*, Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Common Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, White-capped Water Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*, Plumbeous Water Redstart *Rhyacornis fuliginosus*, Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii* and Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*.

A large congregation of Common Coot *Fulica atra* prefers the south-western (and also central part) of the reservoir along the marshy islands. This is also a good area for Gadwall, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Purple Swampphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* (rare), Spot-billed Duck, and Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*. In the scrub and agricultural land adjacent to the eastern and south-western bank of the lake Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark *Eremopterix grisea*, Indian Silverbill *Lonchura malabarica*, Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava*, Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicata*, Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferrea*, Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*, Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*, and Himalayan Bulbul, *Pycnonotus leucogenys* are commonly encountered.

Birdwatching at the barrage should begin from the extreme north-eastern part of the reservoir where the road from Dehra Dun meets it and an umbrella-shaped rain shelter is present. In the morning the sunlight is perfect for photographing waterbirds against majestic Sal forests rising in the background. Mallard, Shoveler, Northern Pintail, Spot-billed Duck, Ruddy Shelduck, Little Egret, Intermediate Egret *Mesophoyx intermedia*, Great Egret *Casmerodius albus* and Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* are commonly encountered at this end. It is on the central islands near this end that passage migrants such as Bar-headed Goose, Greylag Goose, Common Shelduck, and Garganey prefer to pause. Also often observed in this area are Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*, Black-headed Gull *L. ridibundus*, River Tern *Sterna aurantia*, Black-bellied Tern and Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea*.

The marshy land near the mouth of the canal where the River Yamuna enters the reservoir (eastern side) is a good spot for waders with Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus*, Common Greenshank *T. nebularia*, Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, Common

Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* and Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* all possible. Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* also occurs and in the marshes look for Striated Babbler *Turdoides earlei*, Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata* and Painted Stork.

Summer

While most of the winter migrants depart in March the Ruddy Shelduck is the last winter migrant to leave and can be seen here along with Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* on passage in April. During the height of the summer the undisturbed marshy islands located at the eastern end of the lake become the perfect feeding grounds for Painted Stork, Asian Openbill, Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*, and rarely Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*. Purple Heron, Spot-billed Duck, Little Grebe, Common Moorhen and White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* also breed. Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* has also been recorded here. Trees in the scrubland are a permanent breeding location for a colony of Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus*. Other local migrants and residents likely to be encountered around the reservoir and on the Yamuna river bed are Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*, Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*, Savanna Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis*, Black-headed Ibis (rare) and Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris*.

Birds in the Sal forests of Timli

The adjoining stretch of ‘reserved Sal forests’ covering the Shiwalik mountains (Fig. 2) provides a contrast to birdwatching around the barrage. If you have your own vehicle you can drive to Timli (20 minutes) taking the road to Paonta Sahib and then take the left turn after 3 km to Sabbawala and Timli. Turn right after 5 km onto the road to Timli. From this junction Timli is a further 4 km south. On the way to Timli from Asan Barrage Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops leschenaulti*, Green Bee-eater *M. orientalis* and Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* can be seen on electricity wires over the canal or in the forest clearings.

On reaching Timli village one can proceed to the forest resthouse (FRH) – two bedrooms with attached bathrooms, located beside the road. For birdwatching at Timli you can take a number of jungle roads from the FRH in all directions. The jungle road going east and leading to Malhan FRH at Sabbawala (8 km) and further to

Karvapani FRH (17 km), motorable from October-June, being one option. Other options are to go south on the main road to Timli Pass (4 km) on Shiwalik ridge, or west towards Amsot peak (940 m asl) located on top of Shiwalik ridge which is a 2.5–3 km jungle trek. Alternatively one can go 2 km south from Timli FRH towards Timli Pass on the main road until you reach a large metal watertank on the left side of the road. From here you take a left turn onto a jungle road (drivable from October-June) running parallel to the Malhan-Karvapani road, which also reaches Karvapani (17 km). This road passes through undisturbed forest and is rich in wildlife. Once inside these forests look for birds in small openings, grassy patches, fireline clearings, flowering and fruiting trees, bushes and creepers, patches of borer-infested dead sal trees, riverbeds, perennial water sources, large fig and sal trees, cliffs, trees planted around the resthouses, etc. Typical birds of these forests are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Species found in forest habitat at Asan Barage, India

Common Name	Scientific Name
Residents	
Grey Francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>
Jungle Bush Quail	<i>Perdica asiatica</i>
Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
Khalij Pheasant	<i>Lophura leucomelanos</i>
Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
Speckled Piculet	<i>Picumnus innominatus</i>
Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos canicapillus</i>
Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker	<i>D. macei</i>
Greater Yellownape	<i>Picus flavinucha</i>
Grey-headed Woodpecker	<i>P. canus</i>
Himalayan Flameback	<i>Dinopium shorii</i>
Common Flameback	<i>D. javanense</i>
Lineated Barbet	<i>Megalaima lineata</i>
Blue-throated Barbet	<i>M. asiatica</i>
Coppersmith Barbet	<i>M. haemacephala</i>
Oriental Pied Hornbill	<i>Anthracoceros albirostris</i>
Blue-bearded Bee-eater	<i>Nyctyornis athertoni</i>
Crested Treeswift	<i>Hemiprocne coronata</i>
Collared Scops Owl	<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>
Eurasian Eagle Owl	<i>Bubo bubo</i>
Brown Fish Owl	<i>Ketupa zeylonensis</i>
Brown Wood Owl	<i>Strix leptogrammica</i>
Jungle Owlet	<i>Glaucidium radiatum</i>
Brown Hawk Owl	<i>Ninox scutulata</i>
Large-tailed Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus macrurus</i>
Emerald Dove	<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>
Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>
Red-headed Vulture	<i>Sarcogyps calvus</i>
Crested Serpent Eagle	<i>Spilornis cheela</i>
Crested Goshawk	<i>Accipiter trivirgatus</i>
Changeable Hawk Eagle	<i>Spizaetus cirrhatus</i>
Golden-fronted Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
Yellow-billed Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa flavirostris</i>
Ashy Woodswallow	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>

Large Cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina macei</i>
Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike	<i>Hemipus picatus</i>
White-bellied Drongo	<i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>
Spangled Drongo	<i>D. hottentottus</i>
Common Iora	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
Chestnut-tailed Starling	<i>Sturnus malabaricus</i>
Jungle Myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>
Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch	<i>Sitta castenea</i>
Velvet-fronted Nuthatch	<i>S. frontalis</i>
Striated Prinia	<i>Prinia criniger</i>
White-crested Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax leucolophus</i>
Puff-throated Babbler	<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>
Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus erythrogenys</i>
White-browed Scimitar Babbler	<i>P. schisticeps</i>
Black-chinned Babbler	<i>Stachyris pyrrhops</i>
Tawny-bellied Babbler	<i>Dumetia hyperythra</i>
Pale-billed Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchus</i>
Crimson Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>

Winter migrants

Slaty-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula himalayana</i>
Red-breasted Parakeet	<i>P. alexandri</i>
Himalayan Swiftlet	<i>Collocalia brevirostris</i>
Oriental Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>
Wedge-tailed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron sphenura</i>
Grey Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta formosae</i>
Maroon Oriole	<i>Oriolus traillii</i>
Black-hooded Oriole	<i>O. xanthornus</i>
Yellow-bellied Fantail	<i>Rhipidura hypoxantha</i>
Ashy Drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>
Eurasian Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula strophia</i>
Slaty-blue Flycatcher	<i>F. tricolor</i>
Verditer Flycatcher	<i>Eumyias thalassina</i>
Small Niltava	<i>Niltava macgrigoriae</i>
Rufous-bellied Niltava	<i>N. sundara</i>
Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher	<i>Culicicapa ceylonensis</i>
White-tailed Rubythroat	<i>Luscinia pectoralis</i>
Blue-capped Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus</i>
Bar-tailed Treecreeper	<i>Certhia himalayana</i>
Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
Grey-sided Bush Warbler	<i>Cettia brunnifrons</i>
Dusky Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus fuscatus</i>
Lemon-rumped Warbler	<i>P. choronotus</i>
Golden-spectacled Warbler	<i>Seicercus burkii</i>
Grey-hooded Warbler	<i>S. xanthoschistos</i>
Fire-breasted Flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum ignipectus</i>
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Yellow-bellied Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis spinoides</i>
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>

Summer migrants

Blue-tailed Bee-eater	<i>Merops philippinus</i>
Banded Bay Cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis sonneratii</i>
Drongo Cuckoo	<i>Surniculus lugubris</i>
Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
Eurasian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>
Black-naped Monarch	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
Asian Paradise-flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradis</i>
Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>
Asian Brown Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>
Blue-throated Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis rubeculoides</i>
Tickell's Blue Flycatcher	<i>C. tickelliae</i>
Chestnut-shouldered Petronia	<i>Petronia xanthocollis</i>

Passage migrants

Rosy Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus roseus</i>
Dark-sided Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa sibirica</i>
Ultramarine Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula superciliaris</i>
Spot-winged Starling	<i>Saroglossa spiloptera</i>
Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>
Sulphur-bellied Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus griseolus</i>

To observe the magnificent birdlife in and around the Sal forests of Timli accommodation is available at resthouses in Timli, Malhan (Sabbawala), and Karvapani. Reservations for the resthouses at Timli and Van Chetna Kendra (US\$1.0 suite /night) at Asan Barrage can be made with the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), Soil Conservation Division, Kalsi, Dehra Dun (Tel: 91-0135-25052). Reservations for Malhan FRH and Karvapani FRH can be made at DFO Dehra Dun Division, 5-Tilak Road, Dehra Dun 248001 (Tel.: 91-0135-627612). The authors have ten years of experience at these sites and people are free to contact them for more information about birdwatching in the area.

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Arun P. Singh, Entomology Division, Forest Research Institute, P.O. New Forest, Dehra Dun, 248 006, Uttranchal, India; singhap@icfre.up.nic.in

Satpal S. Gandhi, 87-D, Park Road, Dehra Dun, 248 001, Uttranchal, India; gandi@sancharnet.in

Shailendra K. Singh, Forest Survey of India, Kaulagarh Road, Dehra Dun, 248006, Uttranchal, India; fsihq@nde.vsnl.net.in

See page 35 for photos.



Around the Orient

Compiled by Adrian Pitches

CAMBODIA

Giant Ibises found

There is exciting news from Cambodia where a significant population of Giant Ibises *Pseudibis gigantea* has been found. The discovery, which was reported in the June 2001 issue of *Cambodia Bird News*, was made during survey work carried out by Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Cambodian Government Department of Forestry, and Wildlife and Ministry of Environment researchers in Preah Vihear province, deep in the heart of Cambodia's northern plains.

The researchers were able to take the first-ever photographs of the species by setting up remote camera traps in the open deciduous forests and at waterholes – a photograph is automatically taken when an animal moves in front of the camera.

A photograph taken in this way is reproduced below (left).

The Giant Ibis is Critically Endangered, with a global

population estimate in BirdLife's *Threatened Bird of the World* of just 50 birds.

However, survey work in Preah Vihear has found a minimum of 45 birds to date within a vast area of 4,000 km², large tracts of which have yet to be surveyed. Recently, a nest of the species has been found and is being studied. The area also holds healthy populations of other threatened species, including Greater Adjutant *Leptoptilos dubius* (Endangered) and White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* (Endangered). Clearly, Preah Vihear province is important for the conservation of several highly threatened species in South-East Asia, and it is hoped that more news from this exciting region will be featured in forthcoming OBC publications.

Giant 'royal' turtles rediscovered

Giant turtles thought to be extinct in Cambodia for more than a century have been discovered nesting along a southern river bank.

The critically endangered giant estuarine terrapin was once considered the exclusive property of Cambodia's royal family, who dined on the turtles' eggs, Colin Poole, country coordinator for New York-based Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), told Reuters. 'The turtles weren't meant to be harmed because they were the property of the royal family,' he said. They are still referred to as 'royal turtles' by villagers who eat the eggs but not the adults, he added.

Based on the number of nests, WCS believes there are about 50 of the turtles living along the Sre Ambel River system in southern Koh Kong province. Fewer than 100 survive in Malaysia and there may be small numbers in Bangladesh, Poole said.

WCS is working with Cambodian fisheries authorities to establish a protection programme for the turtles, which may involve providing incentives for villagers who guard the nests.



Giant Ibis *Pseudibis gigantea* (Photos: WCS Cambodia Programme (left) and © Eleanor Briggs (right))

Poole said he was also drafting a letter to King Norodom Sihanouk to seek support from the royal family.

Poole (a former chairman of OBC) told *Around the Orient*: 'There were no records of the turtle for 100 years apart from two 50-year-old shells in the Tonle Sap. Then we found one in a zoo here which embarked us on a detective story to find out where it came from. And lo and behold there they are still on the same river where they were originally harvested'.

Source: *Reuters*, February 27, 2001

CHINA

First record of Himalayan Monal for China

Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* has been recorded for the first time from Yunnan, the magazine *Da Ziran* [China Nature] reports. The author, He Zhengjun (apparently a forestry official), says he was walking in Gongshan county in north-west Yunnan, near the borders with Burma and Tibet, on Feb 15, 2001 when he passed a man who was carrying a dead bird in a snakeskin bag. At first he took it to be a Sclater's Monal *Lophophorus sclateri* but the bird turned out to be a Himalayan Monal.

It was made into a specimen and ornithologist Yang Xiaojun of the Institute of Zoology, Kunming, confirmed its identity as a Himalayan Monal and that it was a new Yunnan record. The bird was found near Sijitong village in Bingzhongluo district in the north of the county. Himalayan Monal in greater China is

restricted to a few counties in eastern Tibet.

Source: *Da Ziran* [China Nature] 5:43/Michael Rank

Sino-Russian nature reserve in Manchuria

The Xinhua News Agency has reported cross-border co-operation in nature conservation between China and Russia.

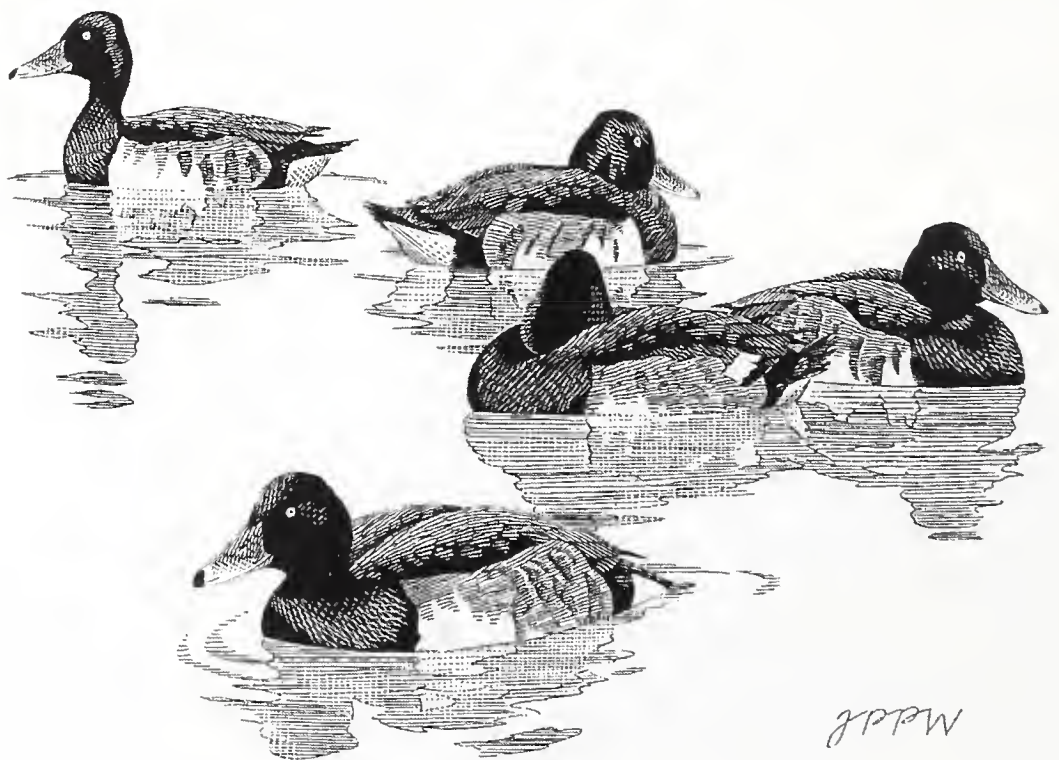
The news release, translated by BBC Monitoring, included the following information: A large nature reserve covering a total of 560,000 ha of land will be established along the lower reaches of the Wusuli River, which borders China and Russia, to give shelter to animal species nearing extinction. According to a recent agreement signed by the governments of China and Russia, the cross-border conservation area will be formed from the two existing nature reserves along each side of the river.

Experts from the two nations will make joint efforts in research, set up an ecological protection network in north-east Asia and establish

a wild species gene bank, according to Zhang Xiyang, director of the Sanjiang Nature Reserve.

It is expected that the reserve will help spur the breeding instincts of some endangered wild animals in the region like the Siberian Tiger, of which there are only 9 to 13 officially-known Chinese territories. Investigation shows that there are about 400 wild Siberian Tigers living in breeding groups in Far East Russia. The situation is more serious for Far East (Amur) Leopards, a species only found in China and Russia and the most threatened big cat in the world with a total population reported to be no more than 50.

Important populations of breeding and migratory waterbirds in the area include Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides*, Bean Goose *A. fabalis*, Greylag Goose *A. anser*, Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*, Falcated Teal *Anas falcata*, Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri*, Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*, Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula*, Smew *Mergus albellus*, Goosander *Mergus merganser* and Scaly-sided Merganser *Mergus*



Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri* by Jan Wilczur

squamatus, according to survey work by reserve staff.

Source: Xinhua News Agency / BBC Monitoring, August 15, 2001

Dustbowl in Tarim Basin threatens Xinjiang Ground Jays

A recent visit to the Tarim Basin in Xinjiang Province, China, by members of the Hong Kong Birdwatching Society revealed major changes since expedition members last visited the area, in 1998.

Much of the desert poplar forest along the northern edge had been ploughed up for cotton farming and the Tarim River had been drained for irrigation to the point where it no longer flows for much of its length, especially during the summer months.

During the three days the expedition was in the area, the sky was permanently hazy from dust clouds in the atmosphere and there was an apparent marked drop in bird numbers present.

The Tarim Basin is the key location for the Xinjiang Ground Jay *Podoces biddulphi*, a species known to be affected by habitat degradation.

Another species affected by the falling water levels is the near threatened White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* – a reservoir where a pair successfully raised two young in 1998 is now dry.

This apparent ecological disaster has been caused by short-term attempts to grow crops in unsuitable soils. Previously, the desert poplars and tamarisk cones helped stabilise the desert topsoil.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 23(3) September 2001

HONG KONG

Long Valley spared

The Hong Kong government has announced that the controversial Lok Ma Chau Spur Line railway project will be routed through a tunnel to avoid impacting Long Valley, Hong Kong's largest freshwater flood plain – and the most important for birds.

The announcement was welcomed by green groups including the Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (HKBWS) and the BirdLife International affiliate in Hong Kong, which had campaigned successfully against the original proposal.

The decision to avoid Long Valley was welcomed by Mike Kilburn, Vice-chairman of the HKBWS. However, he sounded a note of caution: 'We will have achieved nothing until the Hong Kong government takes the necessary steps to ensure the long term future of Long Valley and its birds. It must first secure ownership of the land, currently in the hands of property developers and local landowners, and implement and fund a viable and sustainable management regime. We are confident that if this were to be done, Long Valley would become a wetland reserve of the highest quality'.

Mr Kilburn also noted that despite its success at Long Valley, there are still problems connected to the western terminus of the Spur Line at Lok Ma Chau. Last year up to 73 critically endangered Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* – 10% of a global population of around 700 – were recorded in the area. The planned location of the terminus is inside the

buffer zone for the Inner Deep Bay Ramsar site, which includes the famous Mai Po Marshes Nature Reserve.

Source: Hong Kong Bird Watching Society, October 2001

For further information please contact:

Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (www.hkbws.org.hk)
Mike Kilburn, Vice-chairman,
Tel: +852 2555 6237 (N.B. Hong Kong is GMT +7hrs)
email: mkilburn@hkstar.com

Carrie Ma, Project Officer,
Tel: +852 2377 4387
email: hkbws@hkbws.org.hk

BirdLife International (www.birdlife.net)

Michael Szabo,
Communications Manager,
Tel. + 44 1223 277 318
email: michael.szabo@birdlife.org.uk

INDIA

Darwin vulture project

The British Government has agreed funding for a three-year project on vulture declines in India under the Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species. The project is being carried out by the Institute of Zoology (Zoological Society of London) in collaboration with RSPB and the National Bird of Prey Centre in the UK, and the Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) and an avian diagnostics laboratory (PDRC) in India. The declines were highlighted when Dr Vibhu Prakash of BNHS co-ordinated repeat nationwide surveys of vultures in 2000. The results of these surveys showed a >90% decline, in fewer than 10 years, in both Long-billed *Gyps*

indicus and White-rumped Vultures *G. bengalensis* in all areas surveyed. These species are now considered critically endangered in India. The declines have resulted from massive mortality and low productivity, and this appears to be due to an infectious disease. The Darwin project will: identify the cause of declines; establish aviaries, an investigation facility and laboratory for the care of captive vultures; monitor populations and develop a recovery plan. For further information see <http://www.vulturedeclines.org>

Source: Debbie Pain, RSPB

Bird smuggler foiled

Officials at New Delhi's international airport seized more than 1,200 rare birds from a passenger preparing to fly to Sharjah, customs authorities confirmed.

India's wildlife protection laws ban the export of the birds – 1,200 Red Avadavats *Amandava amandava* and 33 Alexandrine Parakeets *Psittacula eupatria* – which had been concealed in the passenger's luggage, the commissioner of customs said in a statement. The birds were sent to the Delhi Zoo to be cared for. India is believed to be a conduit for international trafficking in wildlife, and the global trade is estimated to run to US\$25 billion annually.

Source: Reuters, May 15, 2001

400 pigeons to lose jobs

For more than half a century homing pigeons have acted as faithful couriers for the Orissa police. Now, nearly 400 of them are set to lose their jobs after a state audit dubbed the service a wasteful expenditure

in modern times. Officials say the state police pigeon service, started way back in 1946, is becoming redundant because of e-mail and the Internet, and that two-thirds of the 600 pigeons would have to go to save Rs. 5.4 million spent on them annually. The police bought the pigeons after World War II to launch a courier service in a coastal state where repeated floods and cyclones make communications often near-impossible. The birds have proved more than useful, rendering yeoman's service during elections and natural disasters by carrying vital messages up to 800 km.

When Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited Orissa in 1948, a Belgian Homer pigeon flew ahead of him carrying messages from Cuttack. The birds also played a stellar role during the floods of 1982 when all communications to a coastal Orissa town were cut off, the pigeons being the only means of messaging between the beleaguered cities.

Even during the 1999 supercyclone, the birds ferried important messages across the devastated zone. Between 1960 and 1973 more than 1,000 pigeons were used by the police service. Now they are used only in the districts of Koraput, Bolangir, Phulbani and Puri, and many of them have died due to both known and mysterious diseases.

The role of pigeons has been shrinking in view of the information technology boom. The police pigeon department employs 32 constables, Sub-Inspectors and their assistants. Officials say these men can be transferred to other departments as and when there are vacancies. The police has decided that 200 of the

'sacked' pigeons would be kept in Cuttack and Angul and the rest would be handed over to the wildlife department.

Source: *Tribune*, 10 October, Chandigarh, India

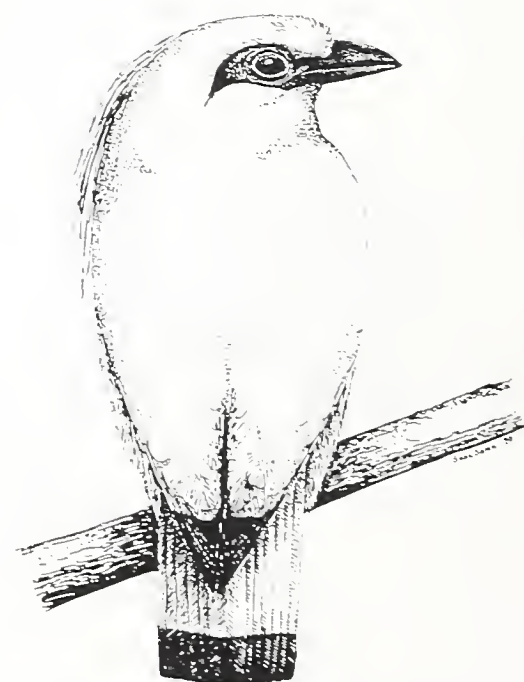
INDONESIA

Flycatcher re-encountered

BirdLife International has announced the 'rediscovery' of the Damar Flycatcher *Ficedula henrici*, a bird endemic to the small island of Damar, north-east of Timor, in southern Maluku Province, Indonesia. See page 38 for more information on this welcome piece of news – eds.

Bali Myna reduced to half a dozen wild birds

There are just six Bali Mynas *Leucopsar rothschildi* left in the wild in Bali Barat National Park, and urgent conservation action is needed if this tiny population is not to be lost. Bali Mynas have been in decline for many years, largely because of relentless trapping of the species for the cagebird trade in Indonesia, where a



Bali Myna *Leucopsar rothschildi* by Bas van Balen

captive Bali Myna is widely regarded as a status symbol.

In recent years PHPA, the government environmental agency managing Bali Barat, has had to contend with theft of the majority of the breeding stock in two armed raids. Now, PHPA is extremely worried about the situation and, with welcome support from local and provincial governments, is redoubling efforts to protect the last remaining birds.

Urgent action could include a release of captive-bred and wild-caught birds, to take advantage of the existence of a wild population – if the free-flying population is lost, the reintroduction effort will be considerably more difficult. In the longer term, the original Bali Myna Action Plan included a controversial proposal to swamp the market through captive-breeding, thus providing local people with a source of income and reducing the pressure on the free-flying population.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 23(3) September 2001

Suharto inadvertently conserves biodiversity

Meanwhile, in a supremely ironic twist, it appears that the former president of Indonesia, who oversaw the systematic plunder of Indonesia's forests, was conserving biodiversity closer to home...

At least one island near Jakarta still boasts of dazzling corals and plenty of fish, and the people owe the Suharto family for its conservation. For years, Pulau Pemagaran in the Thousand Islands area north of Jakarta Bay was one of the former ruling family's quick getaway spots. Now, the island teems with recreational divers, who come for one of the best

coral gardens around and perhaps also for a chance to spot Mr Suharto's fugitive youngest son Hutomo 'Tommy' Mandala Putra.

Pemagaran's fate, however, is looking uncertain after the government unveiled plans to reclaim ownership of privately held 'hideaway' islands in the area and turn them into resorts for the benefit of the nearly 20,000 regular folks who live and work there. Environmentalists and those familiar with the islands' ecology, however, express concerns that further development would destroy the coral reefs and fish still living there. Their worry is that the government and the local people would focus too much on development and not enough on conservation.

Divemaster A. Wahab of Aquapro in Jakarta reported: 'Pemagaran has a good variety of table, brain, fire and fan corals, and also plenty of fish species, damsels, angels and wrasses. But it's a fragile system and easy to destroy. It won't last if more people come, if they build more resorts,' he said. The biggest reason for Pemagaran's current state, Mr Wahab said, is that it was off limits to fishermen and tourists for so many years. 'It is ironic that the Suharto family may have inadvertently conserved Pemagaran', Mr Wahab said.

Source: *Straits Times*, September 25, 2001

The Maleo at Lore Lindu

Research led by Cambridge University scientist Stuart Butchart in 1998 showed that Lore Lindu National Park (LLNP), an area of 217,000 ha of lowland and montane forest in Central Sulawesi is a priority site for the conservation of Maleo

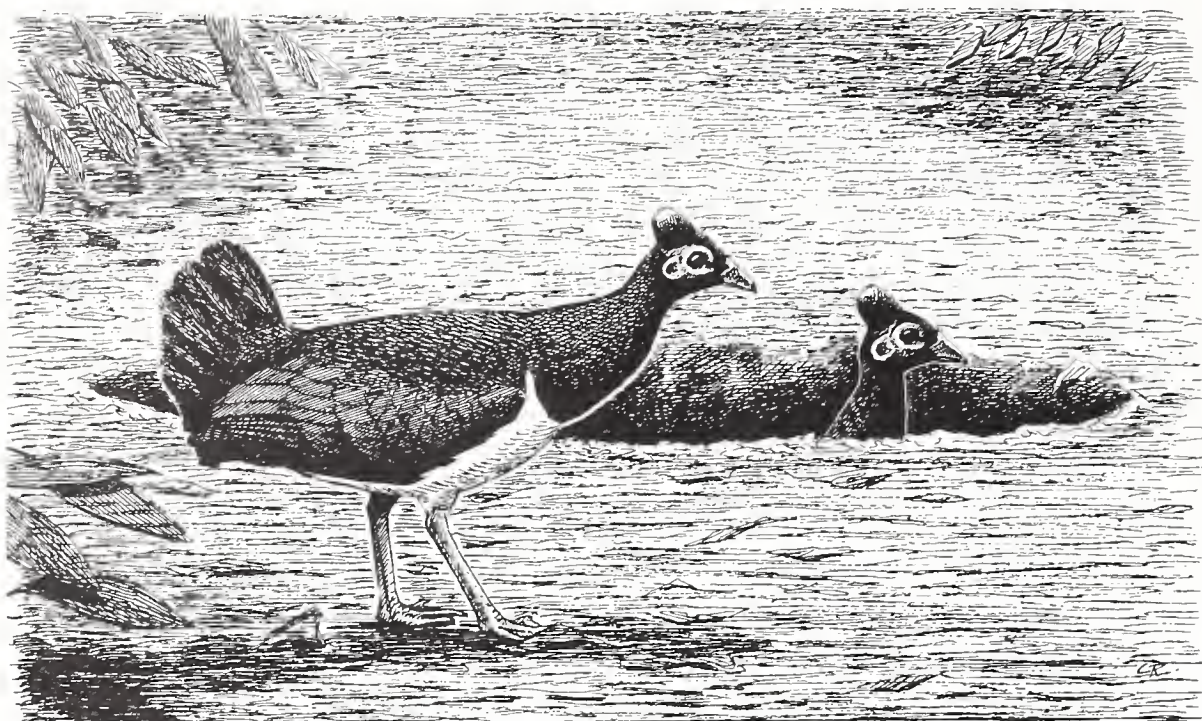
Macrocephalon maleo. Nine nesting sites have been identified in the park, all of which are still in use. The park, therefore, contains 11% of the world's known Maleo nesting sites.

As part of The Nature Conservancy's program to help conserve LLNP these sites were recently re-surveyed by one of TNC's partners Yayasan Jambata, to determine the current status of Maleo in the park. This information is being used by the park Management Team, together with TNC to update the Park's management plan.

The results of the survey are encouraging. Although there appears to have been a decline in population from the 1970s to 1998, numbers have since held steady at all nine nesting sites and even in some cases increased. At one nesting site, near the village of Pakuli there were 164 nesting burrows in 1998, with an estimated population of 50–100 breeding pairs. In 2001, Yayasan Jambata found 1,107 burrows with an estimated population of more than 500 pairs. Another positive result from the survey was the discovery of a previously unrecorded nesting site just outside the park.

The news is not all good however. All sites are threatened by uncontrolled collection of eggs. This is from villagers near the sites collecting for local consumption or sale, and at the more remote nesting sites from opportunistic collection by men staying in the forest to collect rattan.

To combat this problem, and to conserve the Maleo and its forest habitat, Yayasan Jambata together with LLNP



Maleo *Macrocephalon maleo* by Craig Robson

and with support from TNC are about to begin a Maleo Conservation Program in five key villages bordering the park. This program aims to engage the local communities in all aspects of the work; strengthening local institutions, integrating local knowledge and traditional rules in resource management and initiating a community-based assisted Maleo breeding program. If this first stage is successful, it is hoped that it can be used as a model for Maleo conservation elsewhere around Lore Lindu and all over Sulawesi.

Source: TNC Lore Lindu Programme
(EHBP@palu.wasantara.net.id)

BirdLife surveys find threatened species in Komodo National Park

Recent surveys by BirdLife International-Indonesia/PHPA, with assistance from Komodo National Park, have recorded three globally threatened species in the World Heritage Komodo National Park, underlining the importance of this site to conservation efforts in the region.

An estimated 600 – including one flock of 136 – critically endangered Yellow-crested Cockatoos *Cacatua sulphurea* were found in the park, the largest population of this species outside Sumba. The survey team also recorded the vulnerable Flores Green Pigeon *Treron floris* on Komodo, when two birds were found there in October 2000. This means the species has now been recorded on almost all the Lesser Sunda islands from Lombok to Alor. Later in the same month, three endangered Flores Crows *Corvus florensis* were seen on Rinca. This means the species is no longer technically a Flores endemic, although given the proximity of Rinca to Flores, it is hardly surprising that birds should have been found there.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 23(3)
September 2001

JAPAN

Reprieve for Isahaya Bay

Some good news from Japan – the Ministry of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) has announced that they will

scale back reclamation work at Isahaya Bay on the Ariake Sea coast of Kyushu, which is the most important wetland for migratory shorebirds in the country.

Isahaya Bay is Japan's largest area of tidal flats (c.3,000 ha) and a key staging post for shorebirds on the East Asia-Australasia flyway. It's also a major wintering ground for Saunders's Gulls *Larus saundersi* with around 225 birds wintering there – one twelfth of the entire world population (estimated at 3,000 birds).

In April 1997, completion of a 7 km dyke cut off Isahaya Bay's tidal flats from the sea and wiped out most of the marine life that had thrived there. Now MAFF has bowed to the storm of protest in Japan and will attempt to mitigate the damage already caused. The downscaling plan being considered would involve freezing work on the incomplete East Sector (700 ha) and abandoning plans to convert a reservoir (1,700 ha) enclosed by the dyke to freshwater, instead allowing seawater in by opening gates in the dyke.

Protests from pro-development interests are expected, but the Ministry hopes to 'gain their understanding in the final analysis,' because the project is being scaled down, not cancelled, and the dyke will remain in place.

For wetland campaigners in South Korea the change of heart over Isahaya Bay gives them a ray of hope that the controversial Saemankeum project to reclaim 40,000 ha of tidal mudflat may also be halted at the eleventh hour.

Useful websites: http://www.ramsar.org/wwwd_isahaya_bay.html
http://www.earthisland.org/eijournal/fall99/fe_fall99wetlands.html

Source: Nial Moores/Japan Wetlands Action Network/*Oriental Birding*

SINGAPORE

Singapore Bird Race

The 18th Singapore Bird Race was successfully held on 13–14 October 2001.

A total of 13 teams comprising 46 members participated in the 24-hour race and once again, the race was divided into two categories: 'Advanced' and 'Novice', with a heartening total of seven 'Novice' teams.

A total of 184 species was recorded including Ruddy Kingfisher *Halcyon coromanda*, a nesting pair of Grey-headed Fish Eagles *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*, three Aisan House Martins *Delichon dasypus*, up to six Straw-headed Bulbuls *Pycnonotus zeylanicus* (the official race mascot for this year and the subject of an OBC-funded research project in Singapore) and eight Greater Painted-snipes *Rostratula benghalensis*.

The 'Eagles' comprising Lim Kim Seng, Tai Ping Ling and Ivor Lee were runaway title winners in the Advanced category with 134 species. In the Novice category, the 'Piculets' comprising Goh Si Guim, Shawn Lum, Joel Leong and Tan Beng Chiak took the honours with 84 species. The 'Little Terns', led by incumbent Bird Group chairman Lim Kim Keang, took the Century Shield

for the first team to reach one hundred species.

The most life-threatening moment occurred when two stray golf balls landed just inches away from two teams trying to tick off flycatchers at MacRitchie Golf Course.

A total of S\$6,000 was raised for research and conservation projects of the Nature Society (Singapore) Bird Group. This year's race was once again sponsored by Swarovski Optics.

Source: Lim Kim Chuah/Lim Kim Seng, *Singapore Bird Club*

SOUTH KOREA

Reclamation of Saemankeum resumed

One of Asia's most important sites for migratory birds is being destroyed with 40,100 ha of tidal flats and shallows at Saemankeum, South Korea, being reclaimed and converted to rice paddies and agricultural reservoirs. The first stage of the project, the construction of a 33 km sea wall across two estuary mouths, is already 60% finished. Urgent action is required to stop the reclamation, believed to be the largest project of its kind in the world.

The Saemankeum tidal flats are the most important site for migratory shorebirds in South Korea and the Yellow Sea region. They support up to 20% of the world population of Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* and recent counts of 200 Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* and 61 Nordmann's Greenshanks *Tringa guttifer* are amongst the world's highest totals in recent years. Thirty species of

waterbird include internationally important concentrations of Saunders's Gull *Larus saundersi* (10% of the world population), Black-faced Spoonbill *Platela minor* and Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*.

Last year, the Korean Government postponed the controversial reclamation plans, but in May this year the project was relaunched. Currently, a petition is being circulated in South Korea that aims to gather 10 million signatures against the reclamation. Wetlands and Birds Korea (WBK), a Korean NGO, believes that the best way to stop the development is for a mass campaign, with letters of opposition sent to South Korean embassies and global media.

OBC members can help by sending respectful letters of protest to their South Korean ambassador, pointing out the international importance of Saemankeum and urging the authorities in Korea to halt further reclamation activities. For more information on Saemankeum, see WBK's website: <http://www.wbk.or.kr>.

Source: *World Birdwatch* 23(3) September 2001

TAIWAN

Chinese Crested Tern colony fails to reappear in 2001

There is mixed news from the Matsu islands off Taiwan, where a small colony of four pairs of the critically endangered Chinese Crested Tern *Sterna bernsteini* was found breeding in 2000 (see *World Birdwatch* 22 3). The birds were within a colony of about 500 pairs of their

common relative, the Great Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*. In 2001, only one individual Chinese Crested Tern was seen in the area in late May, and they have abandoned the colony they occupied last year, but there are no indications as to where they have gone.

In June, BirdLife's Richard Thomas visited Matsu at the invitation of Wild Bird Federation Taiwan (WBFT, BirdLife in Taiwan). Simon Liao, President of WBFT, Thomas and WBFT members met the Mayor of Matsu who expressed his full support for conservation efforts.

The following day, the group, with press and media visited the nearby tern islands. During a three-hour trip they encountered no fewer than six illegal fishing boats, two of them actually tied up to an islet and the rest fishing within metres of shore. The Taiwan coastguard was called and the boats escorted from the area. According to local reports, this level of disturbance is a daily occurrence.

Later that day, Thomas and Liao met Taiwan's Premier Chang and expressed their concerns over the level of disturbance to breeding birds in the area. They reasoned that the presence of Chinese Crested Terns in Matsu would be a major draw for birdwatchers worldwide, and that conservation of the species was entirely consistent within the stated aims of the government to boost ecotourism to the islands. Premier Chang was sympathetic to their views, and a story reporting official support for conservation of the Chinese Crested Tern appeared in the *Taipei Times* the following day.

Source: *World Birdwatch*

THAILAND

Thailand to ratify Convention on Biodiversity

After a decade of preparing and debating over the issue, Thailand is going to ratify the Convention on Biodiversity within two years, the permanent secretary of the Agriculture and Co-operatives Ministry, Petipong Pungbun na Ayutthaya, has announced.

Mr Petipong said failure to ratify the convention meant Thailand would be denied access to research funds and the right to participate in the process of drawing up international regulations on preservation and utilisation of biological resources. 'A plan to ratify the convention before the year 2003 was also written in the national action plan on biodiversity resources, and will be in effect during 2003–2007,' Mr Petipong added.

So far, 180 countries have ratified the convention that was drafted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. Thailand and Brunei are the only South-East Asian countries still to ratify.

Theerapat Prayurasiddhi, of the Forestry Department's Natural Resources Conservation Office, said Thailand was perceived internationally as lacking environmental consciousness because of its delay in ratifying the pact.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, September 26, 2001

Four-wheeled drive for White-winged Duck

An extraordinary proposal for car rallies through a wildlife sanctuary to raise funds for the White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* has alarmed conservationists.

Forestry chief Plodprasop Suraswadi says he is confident that four-wheel-drive rallies planned to mark the reintroduction of the duck to Huay Kha Khaeng wildlife sanctuary will not damage the World Heritage Site. Environmentalists disagree, saying the release programme is likely to fail anyway. The 30 White-winged Ducks to be set free were raised in captivity and will probably be eaten by tigers.

The rally organisers hoped to raise one million baht to help the Forestry Department's White-winged Duck research and breeding projects. Donors include BMW, Ford, Mazda, and the Petroleum Authority of Thailand.

Environmental groups, including Wildlife Fund Thailand (WFT), demanded the department revise its plans. Surapol Duangkae, WFT secretary-general, said the rally and reintroduction of the duck simply did not go together. Reintroduction to the wild was the last resort in conservation. 'We need to see the cause of population decrease and solve that first. We need to study why the duck has come so close to extinction,' he said. He also warned that a reintroduced animal, if not vaccinated, could be a carrier of disease which could spread to other wildfowl populations.

(UPDATE: The caravan of luxury 4x4 vehicles was halted by protesters at the fringe of Huay Kha Kaeng wildlife sanctuary and the duck release

team continued their mission in vehicles supplied by the Forestry Department. They were forced into the move after a group of 60 locals and environmental activists staged a protest at the sanctuary and prevented the group from entering.)

Source: *Bangkok Post*, August 24, 2001 / August 26, 2001

Mining area handed back to nature

The Forestry Department will annex a plot of mining land to Thung Yai Naresuan wildlife sanctuary, effectively ending mining in the area. 'This is the first time the department has reclaimed forest land from mining companies which have seriously damaged the ecological system,' said director-general Plodprasop Suraswadi yesterday. He hinted there was more to come.

The Mineral Resources Department would not be renewing mining concessions in areas adjacent to the wildlife sanctuary because the mining operations failed to meet environmental standards, Mr Plodprasop said. One mining concession has already expired while two others remain active, one of which (operated by Phol and Son Co.) had heavily polluted Klity Creek in the wildlife sanctuary. The pollution allegedly resulted in several deaths and illnesses among Karen villagers and killed many cattle.

An environmentalist at the Seub Nakasathien Foundation praised the forestry chief's initiative and urged him to do 'the same thing with other mining sites located in the western forest, the country's most pristine forest land'. The forestry chief said it was

possible the department would reclaim the land from every existing mine in the western forest.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, October 10, 2001

Thailand declares five new Ramsar sites

Thailand will propose five conservation areas as Wetlands of International Importance, or Ramsar sites, the National Environment Board said. The areas were chosen from a list of nine, which were shortlisted from 61 areas classified as internationally important wetlands and 48 nationally important wetlands. They are: Nong Bong Khai no-hunting zone in Chiang Rai, 434 ha (2,711 rai); Bung Khong Long no-hunting zone in Nong Khai, 2,214 ha (13,837 rai); Don Hoi Lod in Samut Songkhram, 87,500 ha (546,875 rai); Krabi estuary in Krabi 21,300 ha (133,120 rai); and Phru Toh Daeng (peat swamp) wildlife sanctuary in Narathiwat, 20,260 ha (126,625 rai).

Thailand's first Ramsar site, after Bangkok became a signatory in 1998, was Phru Kwuan Khi Sian in the Thale Noi no-hunting zone in Phattalung.

Source: *Bangkok Post*, June 19, 2001

TIBET

Vultures in Tibet

Vultures are very important in Tibetan culture as they service the sky burials still practised by members of the indigenous human population. The catastrophic decline in vulture populations throughout much of South Asia could therefore

have a severe impact on Tibetan culture. But an initial visit by Simba Chan of the Wild Bird Society of Japan has provided some reassurance. As yet, there are no signs in Tibet of the mysterious infective agent which has killed off so many *Gyps* vultures in India and elsewhere.

Mr Chan reported on *Oriental Birding*: 'The situation of vultures is still O.K. and apparently nothing unusual has been observed'. However, ornithologists and reserve workers in Tibet were not aware of the vulture problems of their southern neighbours. Mr Chan continued: 'I have presented them with a copy of the BirdLife Red Data Book (*Threatened Birds of Asia*), and discussed starting a monitoring programme on vultures in Tibet. My Tibetan friends told me that people who died of infectious disease were not allowed to be "buried" by vultures in fear of infections to the vultures. Naturally they are deeply concerned at what is happening to the vultures in South Asia'.

If you want to contact ornithologists in Tibet working on vulture conservation matters, you can send letters to: Mr. Tsering, Biology Department, Tibet University, 36 East Jiangsu Road, Lhasa, Tibet, China 850000; or Ms. Drolma Yangzom, Director, Division of Wildlife and Nature Preserve Management, Forest Department, 25 Linguo North Road, Lhasa, Tibet, China 850000.

Source: *Oriental Birding* newsgroup contribution by Simba Chan, October 12, 2001

Mekong Wagtail *Motacilla samveasnae*: the great river's only known avian endemic

Introduction

A new species of black-and-white wagtail has recently been described from the lower Mekong catchment of north-east Cambodia, southern Laos and, marginally, north-east Thailand.¹ It has been named Mekong Wagtail *Motacilla samveasnae*, its scientific binomial honouring the late Sam Veasna (pronounced 'Sam Veeshna'), one of Cambodia's leading ornithologists and conservationists, who tragically died of malaria in December 1999.² It is the only wagtail that breeds in the lower Mekong catchment, to which on current knowledge it is restricted (see Fig. 1).

Morphologically, Mekong Wagtail most closely resembles the widely disjunct African Pied Wagtail *M. aguimp*, though it differs in several minor respects, particularly wing pattern, and vocally it is highly distinct.¹ Moreover, mitochondrial DNA comparisons show that divergence between Mekong Wagtail and African Pied Wagtail is greater than between any of the other black-and-white wagtail taxa, and it also exhibits clear differences in moult strategy and habitat choice¹. It is highly distinctive, being the only black-and-white wagtail in South-East Asia exhibiting the adult/first-adult plumage character combination of a black forehead, lores and ear coverts, striking white supercilium, a white throat and white neck patch.^{1,3} (See page 71 for photos.)

Habitat specificity and parallels with other species

Mekong Wagtail is restricted to specific habitats of wide lowland river channels. Breeding birds are strongly associated with fast-flowing braided sections that bisect a distinctive mosaic of rocks, bushes adapted to prolonged seasonal submersion (predominantly *Homonoia riparia*), and some unconsolidated sediment (sandbars and gravel shoals)¹. These become inundated as river levels rise during the May/June-October/November rainy season. The few observations made to date during the high-flow season, all of which have been along stretches known to be used by breeding birds, indicate that the species

concentrates along earthen banks and associated overhanging vegetation, and also restricted patches of exposed sand and silt, where they occur in pairs (some of which seem strongly territorial) and small flocks/feeding aggregations (of up to 12 individuals). It is unclear whether some birds make seasonal movements in response to rising water levels, but this is highly plausible given that some sections of channel mosaic and exposed riverbank used by breeding birds are completely submerged at the height of the high-flow season.

No other Eurasian wagtail exhibits such high habitat specificity. Although Grey Wagtail *M. cinerea* and Japanese Wagtail *M. grandis* are regarded as river/stream specialists, their habitat use is much broader than that of Mekong Wagtail.^{3,4} White-browed Wagtail *M. maderaspatensis* and, in some areas, White Wagtails of the forms *M. alba personata*, *M. alba alboides* and *M. alba leucopsis* are mainly found at or near water, including along rivers, but none of them is nearly so specialised.^{3,5,6} Non-breeding White Wagtails of the form *M. alba leucopsis* abound in southern Indochina during the palearctic winter, particularly along sandbars in rivers and earthen riverbanks, the very habitats generally shunned in the low-flow (breeding) season by Mekong Wagtails; conversely, in channel mosaic, *leucopsis*

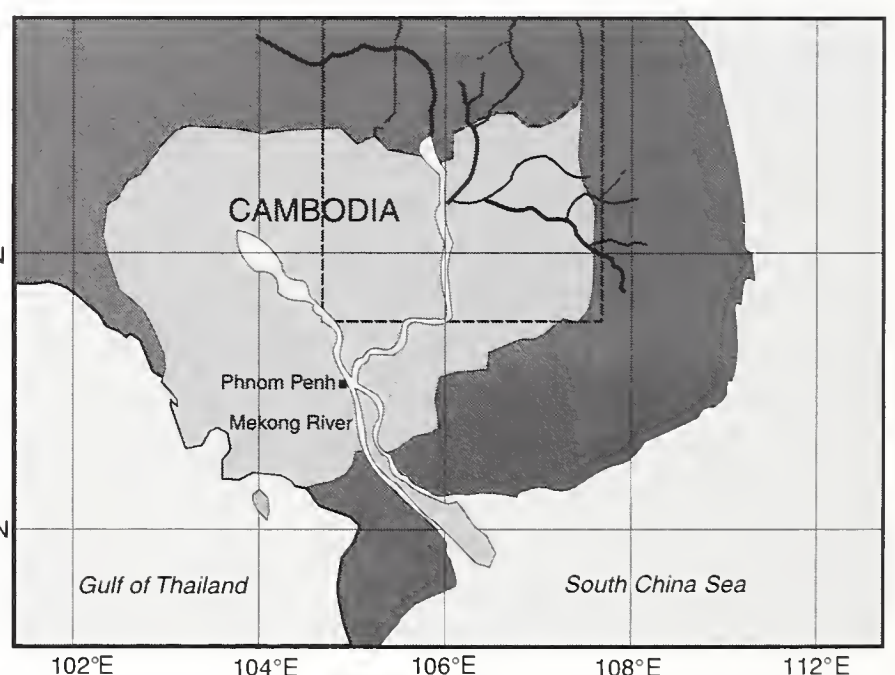


Figure 1: Map showing location of lower Mekong catchment of north-east Cambodia

White Wagtail is less common, occurring mainly in sections with much sand. African Pied Wagtail uses a much wider variety of habitats,^{1,7} including structurally similar channel mosaic habitat, at least in Gabon (JWD unpublished data).

The contrast in habitat use between Mekong and African Pied Wagtails parallels that of the closely related River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii* and Spur-winged Plover *V. spinosus* (of south-east Europe, Africa and the Middle East): in both pairs, the Asian representative breeds only in river channels,^{8,9} while the African representative shows much wider habitat use, being common around non-flowing water.¹⁰ Moreover, Indochinese and African populations of Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* show similar contrast in habitat use.^{1,11}

Mekong Wagtail's strong association with channel mosaic, notably rocks and bushes, recalls that of Jerdon's Bushchat *Saxicola jerdoni* in the upper Lao Mekong.^{12,13} The bushchat has not been found downstream of Vientiane, north Laos. Despite similarities in habitat occupied, size and generally (presumed) insectivorous diet, it is highly unlikely that these two are competitors: their feeding styles are entirely different. Some other factor, yet to be understood, must set their upstream and downstream distribution limits.

Threats to Mekong Wagtail and the wider river-channel bird community

The Mekong mainstream and the Kong, San and Srepok tributaries in Cambodia support healthy numbers of Mekong Wagtail, but the total area they occupy is small. Its linear distribution concentrates the population, making it highly susceptible to perturbations. The chief threat is dam construction, primarily for hydro-electric power generation, and associated changes in water and sediment flow patterns. Many dams have been proposed for the lower Mekong and its major tributaries¹⁴ but for various reasons it is likely that only a small proportion will ever be built, and there is continual flux over which are most favoured. Additive effects on flow/dry-season channel flooding of even a small proportion of these proposed dams could well be very severe for the whole channel bird community, including Mekong Wagtail.

The species is far less susceptible to human activity factors (chiefly hunting, egg collection and disturbance) than are most other sympatric river-channel specialists, many of which are now

close to regional extinction. Thai/Lao river channel bird populations have undergone severe declines,^{15,16,17} and indeed, riverine biodiversity in its entirety in Indochina is in crisis.¹⁸ Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* already appears to be regionally extinct. Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* must now be perilously close to regional extinction, with just three records, perhaps involving just two pairs, over the past five years, despite extensive surveys.¹⁹ A suite of other species have also suffered severe declines, including Great Thick-knee *Esacus recurvirostris*, River Lapwing, River Tern *Sterna aurantia*, Little Tern *Sterna albifrons* and Darter *Anhinga melanogaster*. Most of these are now restricted to the least disturbed stretches of channel mosaic habitat, particularly areas with extensive well-vegetated sandbars.

Lessons to be learned from the 'discovery'

The chronology of events leading this wagtail's 'discovery' provides us with some useful lessons in ornithological rigour. In summary, it transpires that the bird was in fact first collected back in December 1972, on a tributary of the Mun river, Ubon Ratchathani Province, north-east Thailand. These specimens, now held in the Thailand Institute of Scientific and Technological Research, Bangkok, (TISTR) were used to illustrate the form of White Wagtail *M. a. alboides* in Lekagul and Round's *A Guide to the Birds of Thailand*.¹⁵ Wagtails roughly conforming to this illustration were found on numerous occasions during surveys in Laos between February 1993 and late 1999^{16,17,20,21} and in 1997 were suspected to breed in southern Laos (PD unpublished data). When security problems in Cambodia eased in the late 1990s, surveys also began to find this wagtail breeding widely along the Mekong and its larger tributaries in the north-east of the country.^{19,22} *M. a. alboides* breeds no closer than northern Vietnam²³ and north Laos.^{16,20} Thus, these records would have represented a major extension of the form's known breeding range. However, they in fact generated minimal interest because a) they apparently fitted a known taxon portrayed in an excellent field guide, and b) attention was focused on scarcer, declining river channel specialists, thus the relatively numerous wagtails seemed of no elevated conservation concern. As a consequence, sightings of black-and-white wagtails were frequently incompletely documented, and, most importantly (in

hindsight), not ascribed to recognisable subspecies. This has resulted in our current lack of knowledge over the species's range limits, specifically its northern limit along the Mekong, how far up some of her larger tributaries the species occurs, and indeed how abundant it is in southern Laos. It was not until Robson's *Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia*⁹ was published, which accurately illustrates *M. a. alboides* (as indeed does Grimmett *et al.*'s *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*⁶), showing it to be quite distinct from the breeding wagtail of southern Indochina, that the penny finally dropped. Had museum collections been more comprehensively consulted from the outset (skin-checking was in fact thorough, but probably only covered a third or so of all species recorded), the bird's identity would probably have been determined some years ago.

Where to see Mekong Wagtail

Two of the most accessible areas to see the species are in Cambodia, one along the Mekong mainstream at Kampi, just north of Kratie, the other along the lower Kong and San rivers just upstream of Stung Treng.

Daily passenger boats depart Phnom Penh for Kratie (journey time five hours), and a half-hour moto-taxi ride upriver from the town will bring you to Kampi, where numerous boats are available for hire. Kampi is also the most accessible (and best known) locality to see Irrawaddy Dolphin *Orcaella brevirostris* along the Mekong in Cambodia. Several pairs of wagtails inhabit the channel mosaic extending for 2–3 kms upstream of the deepwater pool favoured by the dolphins during the dry season.

At least three return flights a week operate between Phnom Penh and Stung Treng, where again it is easy to find a boat to hire and either take upstream a couple of kilometres, from where the wagtail is common – one of the best stretches of river is along the San just upstream of its confluence with the Kong, or head downstream into the Mekong main channel and explore the mosaic habitat both up and downstream of the Mekong/Kong confluence.

Alternatively, the stretch of the Mekong main channel in extreme southern Laos between Khon Falls and the Cambodian border is another good place to look, this area also supporting several Irrawaddy Dolphins.

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Pete Davidson^{1,3}, Will Duckworth² and Colin Poole¹

¹Wildlife Conservation Society Cambodia Programme, P.O. Box 1620, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. petedavidson@bigpond.com.kh or poole@bigpond.com.kh

²Will Duckworth, East Redham Farm, Pilning, Bristol BS35 4JG, U.K.

³Pete Davidson, Woodspring, Bowcombe Creek, Kingsbridge, Devon TQ7 2DJ, U.K.



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Asian birds on the brink

N. J. Collar, chief editor of *Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book* (review p.72) gives some background to the project and reflects on some of the things it reveals.

Since the early 1960s BirdLife International (formerly the International Council for Bird Preservation) has had the formal responsibility, conferred by IUCN–The World Conservation Union, for preparing and publishing the global Red Data Books which identify and document the world's threatened birds (these then feed into the IUCN Red List, which evaluates all species against numerical criteria for endangerment). In April 1981, when I took up the job of compiler of the bird RDB, ICBP's Executive Committee had decreed that the work should proceed geographically, beginning with Africa; and after Africa in 1985 it was decided to do the Americas, which took me through until 1992.

This was, of course, deeply unfair to Asia. My most immediate but admittedly token attempt to compensate was to pick what seemed to be Asia's most threatened species and document it, in the hope that this might help matters. The result was the review paper on Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* in *Forktail* 1: 29-51, written with Phil Round and David Wells, which helped confirm Phil in his long-held suspicion that the mysterious creature was a level-lowland forest dweller. In this sense it *did* intensify the focus and accelerate the search, resulting as we all now know in the great rediscovery—not a moment too soon—of May 1986, a few weeks before the paper itself appeared. (I continue to hold this up as evidence that Red Data Books really *can* make a contribution to species conservation; but sadly the international bird RDB programme is the only one that survives today.)

The second and more considered attempt to compensate Asia (and indeed the rest of the still undocumented threatend species of the world) was to write, with Paul Andrew, a stop-gap annotated 'red list'. This book, *Birds to Watch*, which appeared in early 1988, greatly expanded the number of birds formally listed as at risk in Asia, and gave the still very young Oriental Bird Club a clear focus in its conservation giving and in its reporting of records. Where the late 1970s RDB, compiled by Warren King, had treated a mere 52 Asian species as threatened (18 of them pheasants!), ten years on *Birds to Watch* identified 286, five-and-a-half times as many. (One of the

crucial immediate results of this was the establishment of the BirdLife Indonesia Programme, since Indonesia had suddenly leapt to the top of the table of countries with the most threatened birds, a position previously held by Brazil.) In 1994 *Birds to Watch* 2 repeated the analysis, and in 2000—with rather more detail and infinitely more pizzazz—*Threatened Birds of the World* carried the species and categorisations that had been determined by the editors of the then almost complete *Threatened Birds of Asia*.

Nevertheless, the deep review of each Asian threatened species remained a gap that badly needed filling. Detailed documentation greatly increases the confidence with which a team of compilers can determine whether a species is truly threatened or not. The nature of the problem can partly be gauged from Table 1. The figures there clearly suggest that the numbers of species in the region reckoned to be in danger have been stabilising over the past decade, and to a degree this is true, but internally there are still quite a number of adjustments taking place as species exit and enter the lists. Of the strigid owls, for example, 12 were listed in 1994 and nine in 2001, but only six of these are common to the two lists. Moreover, because the passerine totals for 1988 (113) and 2001 (114) are virtually identical, the species involved might also be assumed to be very similar; but in reality the lists are amazingly different, sharing between them as few as 70 species, which is a mere 45% of the 157 (70+43+44) present on both. It is not that the earlier analyses were substandard—rather it is that new descriptions, new taxonomic treatments, new circumstances and new information have combined down the years to create this retrospectively high degree of instability; but above all it has been the patient and exhaustive assembly and evaluation of *all* the information, from the literature, museum skins and personal witness, that has now, I believe, brought a new level of certainty to the current list.

To cope with species which just failed to qualify as threatened in the Africa RDB, Simon Stuart and I invented the category 'Near Threatened', and this has now been formally adopted by the IUCN Red List programme. The

great majority of the species that have, over the years, fallen out of the earlier lists are to be found in this category, which is perhaps further evidence that the earlier evaluations were not so very inaccurate. *Threatened Birds of Asia* provides paragraphs on 317 such species, and the addition of these and 23 Data Deficient plus one Conservation Department species to the 323 threatened species means that in total no fewer than 664 species of bird in Asia are now considered cause for global conservation concern. This is *one quarter* of the Asian avifauna. The global totals for threatened, Near Threatened and Data Deficient are 1,186, 727 and 79 respectively; and on this basis Asia contains precisely *one-third* (664/1,992) of all bird species of global conservation concern.

Discounting the 1970s analysis, which obviously under-researched and under-represented the situation in Asia, the proportion of threatened non-passerines in the Asian avifauna has been growing over time (60% in 1988, 61% in 1994, 65% in 2001). This begins to tell us something interesting, because if we look at the situation outside Asia we find there are 421 non-passerines out of a total of 863 bird species, which is fractionally under 50% and far closer to expected, given that non-passerines form 40% of the global avifauna. A reasonable explanation of this is that the larger, more widespread birds (as the 'non-near-passerines' in particular *tend* to be) are significantly more at risk in Asia than elsewhere, a circumstance attributable to two pressures: exploitation, and landscape conversion on such a scale that even relatively well distributed and extensive habitats (particularly lowland forest and both inland and coastal wetlands) are no longer sanctuary to the largest and widest-ranging species. Indeed, perhaps the most telling statistic is that Asia possesses over 60% of globally threatened species with ranges greater than 50,000 km². This to me is a clear message that it simply does not pay to be a large bird in a region which holds over 50% of the world's human population.

And so it is that we find two pelicans, four herons, five storks, three ibises, one spoonbill, 11 waterfowl and six cranes in the book, representing high proportions of the region's big, wide-ranging wetland animals. Typically these are species which, in primordial times (by which I mean before man had worked out how to shoot an arrow), must have occurred in enormous numbers, but which have steadily been depleted to their current levels of a few hundreds or a few

thousands, both by relentless hunting pressure and by ever-intensifying habitat erosion. We also, for the same reasons, find three large open-country eagles with enormous ranges (Pallas's Fish-eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus*, Great Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga* and Imperial Eagle *A. imperialis*) and the heavyweight Great Bustard *Otis tarda*, whose world record for the threatened bird with the broadest longitudinal span has proved no guarantee against the ubiquitous iniquities of mankind.

And we even find a suite of extreme lowland tropical rainforest birds, wide-ranging in the Sundaic region—which extends from southernmost Burma to Java—but most sensitive to habitat disturbance and least capable of surviving on the marginally more secure lower forested slopes: Wallace's Hawk-eagle *Spizaetus nanus*, Black Partridge *Melanoperdix nigra*, Crestless Fireback *Lophura erythrophthalma*, Large Green-pigeon *Treron capellei*, Short-toed Coucal *Centropus rectunguis*, Sunda Nightjar *Caprimulgus concretus* and Blue-banded Kingfisher *Alcedo euryzona*. These species, none of them particularly large, seem to be sharply at risk from the intense fragmentation and isolation of their habitat—and of course it is only in the past few years that we have woken up to the extent of the deforestation crisis in the Sundaic lowlands (see, e.g., '7,000 hornbills a day' in the previous Bulletin's Chairman's Letter). By contrast, the (fewer) threatened passerines that share this habitat are almost all confined to either Borneo or Sumatra rather than being spread through most of the biome.

This bias towards non-passerines in what one might call the taxonomy of endangerment is also revealed in the breakdown of species by degree of threat. There are three categories; in order of increasing intensity they are Vulnerable, in which non-passerines outnumber passerines 135 to 82, Endangered, where the proportions are 43 to 22, and Critically Endangered, 31 to 10, so that the non-passerine percentage for each respective category is 62%, 66% and 76%. Again this reinforces the point that the possession of a large body is a liability uncompensated by the possession of a large range.

Range size is, however, a critical element in determining conservation status. Looking again at the list of Critical species it is immediately striking how many of them are confined to relatively small islands: 21 of the 41 are scattered between Okinawa, Amami, Mindoro, Negros, Panay, Cebu, Tawitawi, Sangihe, Siao, Buru,





- 1 Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus*. Photo: Pete Morris
- 2 White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*.
Photo: Pete Morris
- 3 Straw-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus zeylanicus*.
Photo: Christian Artuso
- 4 Swinhoe's Rail *Coturnicops exquisitus*. Photo:
Peter Los
- 5 Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus* and Swan
Goose *Anser cygnoides*. Photo: Peter Los
- 6 Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*
Photo: Tim Loseby
- 7 Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*.
Photo: Tim Loseby
- 8 Cheer Pheasant *Catreus wallichii*.
Photo: Tim Loseby

Boano and Bali, plus Christmas Island and a curious handful of West Sumatran/West Bornean islets; another six are on the wider Philippines, Sumatra, Java and the Lesser Sundas; two are coastal; and 12 are continental (of which no fewer than six are predominantly or exclusively Indian, and two—the White-eyed River-martin *Eurychelidon sirintarae* and Gurney's Pitta—are the bafflingly ungraspable jewels in the crown of Thailand). Altogether 183 (57%) of all threatened birds in Asia have ranges of less than 50,000 km², BirdLife's threshold value for identifying the restricted-range species which make up Endemic Bird Areas; but more interestingly as many as 62 of them occupy ranges of as little as 100–5,000 km², with 51 in the range 5,000–20,000 km².

Table 1. The changing status of threatened birds in Asia.

	1970s	1988	1994	2001
Non-passerines	47	173	196	209
Passerines	5	113	123	114
TOTAL	52	286	319	323
% global total	18	28	29	27

Birds with what are essentially linear habitats, at least for large parts of their life cycles, represent a significant and increasing problem. Species like the Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis*, Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* and some of the kingfishers (Blue-banded) which ply up and down rivers, and shore- and seabirds like Chinese Egret *Egretta eulophotes*, Spotted Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* and Saunders’s Gull *Larus saundersi*, which forage in relatively narrow littoral areas, may appear on a map to occupy huge areas, but are in reality compressed into miniscule one-dimensional ranges. Human disruption of these ranges—the manifold dams, the fishing disturbance, the massive reclamation of mudflats all down the Chinese seaboard—carries a heavier price for such species than we sometimes recognise.

But the pressures are everywhere. Threatened birds occur in every political unit in Asia, even the Maldives. Habitat loss or degradation affects almost every species to some degree, and it has a strong impact on 191 (59%) of them. Exploitation, whether for trade or for food, affects well over half the species, and has a strong impact on 85 (26%). It makes for a heady mix, especially with the inclusion of less encompassing but locally often very serious problems such as pollution, disturbance and invasive aliens. Small wonder that this two-part but essentially single-volume book—3,000 pages, 1.5 million words, 1,000 data contributors, 7,000 references—is possibly the biggest book ever written on birds, or indeed in the entire sphere of conservation.

The reason for such size is simply this: even more important than facilitating an assessment of the threat status of a species, the detailed assembly and analysis of all the information relevant to its conservation directly helps determine the best possible and most appropriate conservation measures. Time and again you hear of management decisions being taken for species on the basis of utterly inadequate information—predictably resulting in huge wastage of time, money and human resources. Red Data Books exist, at least in part, to diminish the chances of

precipitate and ill-considered responses to species crises: they are there to provide the entire constituency of concerned individuals—government officials, NGO workers, academics, members of civil society—free access to the best available evidence. Of course, researchers might be expected to do their own research, but they rarely if ever do, typically lacking the languages or access to the resources or simply the understanding of the value and relevance of any information more than 10 years old. If the team that set off a few years ago to search for the Pink-headed Duck *Rhodonessa caryophyllacea* on a high-altitude lake in northern Myanmar had simply read all the sources (and certainly if they had had the account assembled in *Threatened birds of Asia*), they could have saved themselves a lot of money and effort and heartbreak (they found a Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*).

The biggest innovation in this new book, and one reason for its size, is the use of maps to illustrate the ranges of the threatened birds. This was a major undertaking by Rudyanto and Mike Crosby (who in their non-BirdLife lives are OBC rep for Indonesia and an OBC Conservation Committee member respectively). So far as I know this is the first time a significant body of species from any class of animal has ever been mapped by virtue of fully referenced point localities. The British Museum’s wonderful atlases of speciation in African birds used point localities but did not reference the dots (nor did they go for full coverage of the records). Point-locality maps are the most accurate basis for identifying distributions, since they simply express the known sites of each species (the problem of species mapping was highlit in Bulletin 32: 46-47). Basically, you get a skeleton or a foundation: you know there must be (or must have been) connectivity between the dots, but you don’t know exactly what form it takes or took, or what discontinuities exist today—but you *do* have the best basis for the dangerous business of extrapolation (for just how dangerous, see Bulletin 32: 50-52), and the least misleading body of evidence from which to begin. You also have a chart by which field investigations can be oriented: knowing for certain where a bird was once found is a major incentive to going and looking again.

The maps may not always be very revealing, especially when the range of a species is small, but often they are striking. Moreover, by giving three kinds of dot to convey different time-periods, you can distinguish old from new

records, and the fate of species and populations can more easily be discerned. Thus the retreat of the Indian Skimmer from the eastern sectors of its range is strongly brought home, as is the tenuousness of the Graceful Pitta's *Pitta venusta* hold on life. The map of the Straw-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus zeylanicus* evokes more eloquently than the 14 pages of accompanying text the staggering manner in which this remarkable songster has been trapped out of existence in its once-sprawling Indonesian range. The Green Peafowl *Pavo muticus* reveals three roughly north-south population centres which are rather neatly aped by the White-winged Duck *Cairina scutulata*, albeit with a several-degree shift westwards. The mysterious Swinhoe's Rail *Coturnicops exquisitus* presents a weird diaspora of records old and new. The enormous, empty range of the Pink-headed Duck, and the still more enormous and almost as empty range of the Crested Ibis *Nipponia nippon*, set your mind racing. Indeed these maps also offer many real challenges: the unevenness, for example, in the distribution of Bornean lowland forest birds is intriguing—why does the Short-toed Coucal have so many records focused in northern Sarawak and adjacent western Sabah and so few elsewhere, why are records of Large-billed Blue-flycatcher *Cyornis caerulata* all concentrated in the top half of the island, and why are there so few northern records of Black Partridge *Melanoperdix nigra*?

It would be wrong to imply that nothing is being done for the threatened birds of Asia; on the contrary, the RDB is full of details of the good work that is under way at all levels to promote the conservation of species in the region. But there is still so much to do. Back in 1994 we knew that, of the top five countries in the world for numbers of threatened birds, Asia had four (Indonesia, Philippines, China and India). We knew, too, that if you took all the countries in the world and ranked them by number of endemic threatened species in the higher categories of threat (Critically Endangered and Endangered, leaving out Vulnerable) the Philippines came way top of the list. But I like the idea that the Chinese word for crisis is also their word for opportunity, even if it isn't true. It is easy to be depressed by the situation, but you may as well get excited by it instead.

On the formal side of things, BirdLife is developing a *Strategy for threatened birds in Asia* to reinterpret all the detail of the RDB into a clear, simple plan of action. This will be taken forward by the BirdLife Asia Partnership, which

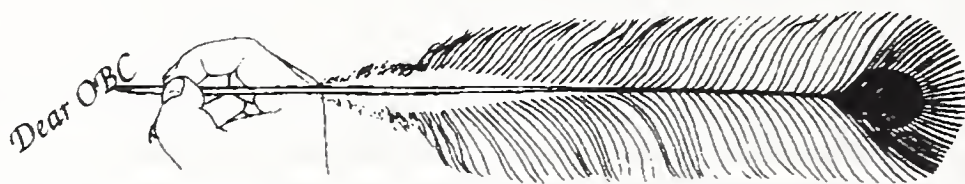
commissioned the RDB, but also by the wider BirdLife family, particularly in its policy areas, and through the agendas of other global, national and local conservation organisations and even, with luck and advocacy, some government agencies and donor institutions. (Some of it, of course, is already being taken forward by the Oriental Bird Club, and when the *Strategy* appears there will be further opportunities for OBC engagement.) BirdLife's main conservation tool is its Important Bird Areas Programme, which is directly fed by the Red Data Book and will be greatly advanced by (and itself advance) the *Strategy*. Moreover, BirdLife has launched an Asia Bird Fund to help pay for some of the actions the *Strategy* identifies.

On the informal side, the list of things that birders can do to help is enormous. Our understanding of the distribution, abundance and ecology of so many threatened birds in Asia is still incredibly primitive. Of course birders do a lot just by keeping the wheels of local tourist-gear economies mildly oiled, but for those with the resources (and I appreciate this cannot mean everybody) getting beyond the stake-outs is ever more urgent. Looking for birds in new areas has got to be one of the big things birders can set themselves to do, even if it sometimes causes logistical nightmares. Trying to get a handle on numbers of birds in an area is, admittedly, more fraught because of demands of methodology, but even so birders can always record the number of encounters and the distance between them, log the altitude, make subjective assessments of habitat, watch how birds feed and what they take (photograph the food plant for someone else to identify), record their foraging height and position in the vegetation, look out for nests and simply *record their voices* (often the key to determining how abundant they are). All these things help build the profile of the species in question; and the *Strategy* proposes to establish a website on which birders can post all these observations.

Acknowledgements

Threatened Birds of Asia is the product of thousands of contributors working through 130 national compilers feeding back to five editors other than myself, and I ought to say how grateful I am to all these people for their part in the project. I am also most grateful to Alison Stattersfield and Mike Crosby of BirdLife International for their help with and comments on this article.

To the Editor



Gurney's Pitta again

Habitat protection and/or captive breeding? That's the question.

Many initiatives to save Gurney's Pitta *Pitta gurneyi* have been launched, as readers of this journal well know. In the last issue, Chris Gooddie described his London Marathon run to raise money. In the same issue it was reported that continued destruction of the pitta's remaining lowland forest habitat and disturbance by visiting 'listers' who fail to follow the simple guidelines of good behaviour are the biggest threats for the remaining few birds.¹

The potential of captive breeding as an aid in avian conservation is often considered questionable and usually considered only as a last resort. However, IUCN recommend establishing a captive population when the wild population falls below 1,000 individuals.² A recent survey concluded that about 12 pairs of Gurney's Pitta now remain in the wild and BirdLife International³ presents a still more pessimistic assessment of 18 individuals. With so few individuals one must realise that the bird is on the brink of extinction, that previous efforts have been unsuccessful and that emergency measures are now required.

The following proposals are taken from the literature, but modified to take into account the particular situation that Gurney's Pitta is in. I feel they should be given serious consideration:

1. Removing eggs from a few nests, artificially rearing them, and releasing the fledglings as soon as they are self-supporting.
2. Doing the same, but with only the weakest chick from each nest, as its chance of survival in the wild is small anyway.
3. Cross-fostering eggs and young to another species to boost productivity.
4. Letting zoos with the necessary expertise and facilities take over.
5. Attempting to establish whether nest predation is a serious problem using video surveillance and subsequently implementing control measures.

As for the first two options, and particularly the third, these would be very cheap and carry a

reasonable chance of success. Experiences at the Walsrode Vogelpark in Germany indicate that young Banded Pittas *Pitta guajana* are rather easy to hand-rear and later can be housed peacefully with adult conspecifics (Simon Bruslund Jensen *in litt.*). Although both Hooded *P. sordida* and Blue-winged Pittas *P. moluccensis* are common in Khao Nor Chuchi, the Gurney's nearest relative, the Banded Pitta is rare,⁴ but perhaps these other species could be used as fosterers. It should be noted that wild Gurney's Pittas will very likely lay a replacement clutch following removal. The third method was used with great success to save the Chatham Robin *Petroica traversi* from extinction with the help of the common Chatham Island Tit. The population now stands at 259 birds.^{3,5}

Captive breeding of Mauritius Kestrel *Falco punctatus*, Mauritius Pigeon *Columba mayeri* and Mauritius Parakeet *Psittacula echo* resulted in a better understanding of our responsibility to save natural resources. Implementation of captive breeding by zoo staff with appropriate expertise (option four) led directly to the development of a National Park in Mauritius, and habitat improvement on Round Island and Ile aux Aigrettes.^{3,6,7} Moreover, zoos would probably get involved and meet most cost themselves, because Gurney's Pitta is a very beautiful and charismatic bird with much publicity value and modern zoos have vast experience in fund raising, finding donors and lobbying local politicians for support.^{2,8} In 1998 there were about 14 Bali Mynas *Leucopsar rothschildi* in the wild, but at the same time more than 700 in captivity,⁹ while at present there are regrettably only a few confiscated Gurney's Pittas in Thai zoos. The California Condor *Gymnogyps californianus*,¹⁰ the Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*¹¹, and the Socorro Dove *Zenaida graysoni*³ are all pertinent examples here.

The Echo Parakeet and the Pink Pigeon were both successfully saved by identifying and controlling nest predators.⁷

The danger of inbreeding depression is of course something that has to be taken into account. However, there are many examples of recovery from very constricting bottlenecks: consider the Mauritius Kestrel (six individuals, of which two didn't breed), and the Chatham

Robin (one breeding pair), both of which recovered successfully. With so few remaining wild Gurney's Pittas, they are already going through a severe genetic bottleneck.

It has long been known that pittas can be bred easily in captivity.¹² For success it is necessary to have large aviaries with high humidity and dense vegetation and bathing facilities. In recent years many aviaries, especially in zoos, have successfully bred several species of pitta.¹³

The dialogue with the Thai Government has clearly not been a success. There are many and varied pressures on land use, and saving a few remaining individuals of a rare bird seems only a minor concern. Let us recognise this and act before it is too late. Gurney's Pitta may well be the next species to become extinct. We have to decide whether having a species in captivity is better than not having it at all.

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Johannes Erritzoe

Captive breeding for Gurney's Pitta: a brief comment

Johannes Erritzoe's remarks are thoughtful and timely, and to some extent mirror what was very recently published in *Threatened Birds of Asia*. There it is suggested that a new survey of the range of Gurney's Pitta should be conducted with a view to locating any remnant individuals or pairs in small, isolated and unprotectable woodlots. Such otherwise doomed birds could be captured for a breeding programme run by a distinguished and experienced institution such as the Durrell (formerly Jersey) Wildlife Preservation Trust. *Threatened Birds of Asia* also reveals that the species was kept and bred in captivity in the 1960s by someone who had no idea at the time of their great rarity. Pittas do indeed appear to be relatively easy to 'acclimatise', and there is no doubt that a reserve pool of birds under total human management would be reassuring.

Nevertheless, the difference between Gurney's Pitta and all the examples Johannes Erritzoe cites is that the cause of the crisis in Gurney's Pitta is the destruction of the single last place on earth where a viable population is known to live. With the other species the problem has been poaching or poisoning or alien predators, etc., not plain and pure habitat loss. If we cannot save that one last site, Khao Nor Chuchi, we will have nowhere else to release captive-bred Gurney's Pittas when the time comes to try. Moreover, there is always the risk that if you take birds from KNC into captivity, someone somewhere will decide that it's okay now to go ahead and cut the whole place down. (This is, of course, no less a risk if a captive population can be constructed from non-KNC individuals, and something over which we would need to be particularly vigilant.)

It is certainly worth keeping all options open, however, and the Durrell Trust is already aware that their services could in due course be required. For the moment, however, I cannot accept that the dialogue with the Thai government has failed. The Council of OBC remains committed to continue that dialogue until we get the sensible, simple decision which we believe is fully within the gift and grasp of the Royal Forest Department.

N. J. Collar

Needletails *Hirundapus* in northern Luzon

On 16 February 1994, near Adams, in Ilocos Norte Province, flocks of Needletails *Hirundapus* were regularly seen flying high over the ridge just north of the town. One flock was seen at quite close range on a hill further north: they were brown with pale backs, and the throat was noted as not being white. Though none of the 'brown' needletails has been recorded from Luzon, I assumed at the time that they were Brown-backed Needletails *Hirundapus giganteus*. Having subsequently had good views of this species, I am sure that these birds had much paler backs. Further study of the known distributions of *Hirundapus* spp. makes me think they were probably wintering Silver-backed Needletails *H. cochinensis* from Taiwan: the wintering grounds of this population have yet to be established.¹ This would be a new species for the Philippines but remains to be confirmed.

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Des Allen

First breeding record of Little Gull *Larus minutus* in Xinjiang, China

Little Gull *Larus minutus* is a very rare species in China, placed in the List of Nationally Protected Wildlife (1989). According to Prof. Cheng Tso-hsin¹ and Zhao Zhengjie² the Little Gull is only a migratory species in Xinjiang and has previously been recorded at Hulun Buir and Hinggan in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Beidaihe in Hebei Province, Zhenjiang in Jiangsu Province and also Hong Kong. In both July 2000 and June 2001 we found a small breeding population close to the Altai Mountains, evidence that the Little Gull is a breeding species in Xinjiang.

The Little Gull is the smallest gull in the world. It has broad rounded wings, which in the adult are characteristically blackish below, contrasting sharply with the white trailing edge. The head is black, without white eye-crescents. The neck, tail and underparts are white, the breast often flushed with pink. The bill is dark red to reddish-black

and the legs are also red. The male and female are similar, both being very easy to identify in the field during the breeding season.

On 1 July 2000, we found at least eight adults and three juveniles at a small salt lake between Burqin Town and Altay City (47°42'N and 87°33'E), at an altitude of about 493 m. They were fairly tame and though on their nesting grounds, they could be easily approached and photographed. On 24 June 2001, a birdwatching group from Hong Kong (Judith Fruin-Ball, Lawrence Johnstone, Mike Kilburn and MM) counted at least 20 adults at the same lake. The birds were still present in July, with some actually incubating. Several other species were present at the site including Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus*, Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica*, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus*, Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, snipes *Gallinago* spp., Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata* and Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*.

At times the breeding gulls were seriously disturbed by human activities; local people were hunting, digging up herbs *Glycyrrhiza* spp., mining salt, and dredging etc. We also noticed that there was an overpopulation of domestic animals around the small salt lake where the gulls were breeding.

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Ma Ming, Xinjiang Institute of Ecology and Geography, Chinese Academy of Sciences, No.40 Beijing Road, Urumqi 830011, Xinjiang, P.R. of China; maming@ms.xjb.ac.cn

Wang Qishang, Anhui University, Hefei 230039, P. R. of China

Notes on the elevational distribution of Palawan Peacock Pheasant

The Palawan Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron emphanum* is a secretive ground bird endemic to Palawan Island. It is considered to be uncommon and in decline.¹ The bird is listed as endangered² and vulnerable^{3,4} by various organizations and authors. Its known habitat is listed as primary and secondary lowland and hill forest.^{1,4}

While conducting small mammal research in the mountains of Palawan between February and July 2000 I noted the presence of *P. emphanum* at two primary forest sites. The first site is a primary lowland forest located at 300–700 m above sea level on the slopes of Mt. Salakot, Puerto Princesa. At this site, I observed the ease with which locals are able to capture the birds. I witnessed the capture of both male and female birds with only minimal trapping effort exerted.

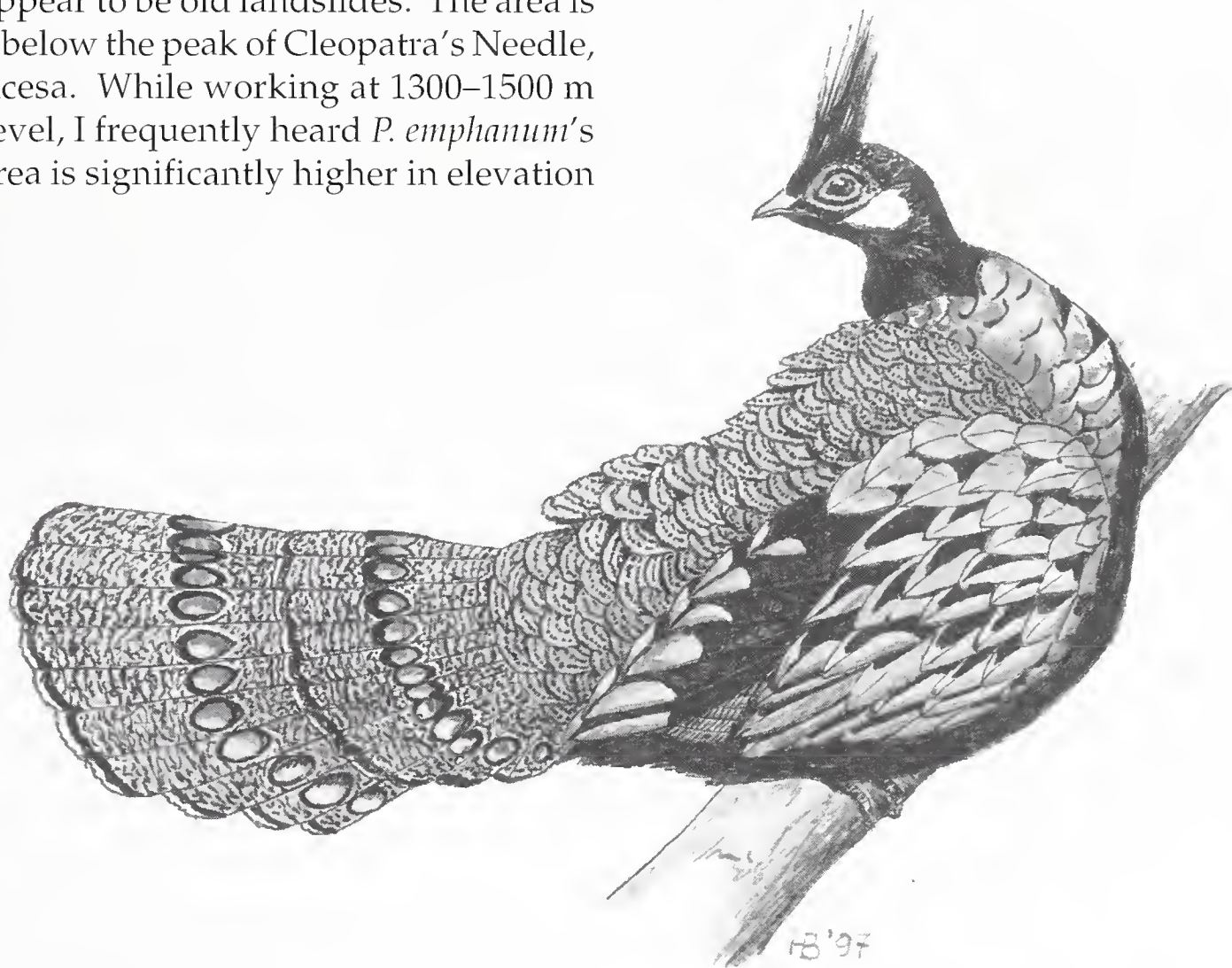
The second site is a primary montane forest with patches of dense bamboo *Schizostachyum* in areas that appear to be old landslides. The area is located just below the peak of Cleopatra's Needle, Puerto Princesa. While working at 1300–1500 m above sea level, I frequently heard *P. emphanum*'s call. This area is significantly higher in elevation

than has been previously reported as suitable habitat for *P. emphanum*.

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Jacob Esselstyn, Palawan Council for Sustainable Development Staff, 122 West Ave., Quezon City, Philippines



Palawan Peacock Pheasant *Polyplectron emphanum* by Hil Bruinsma

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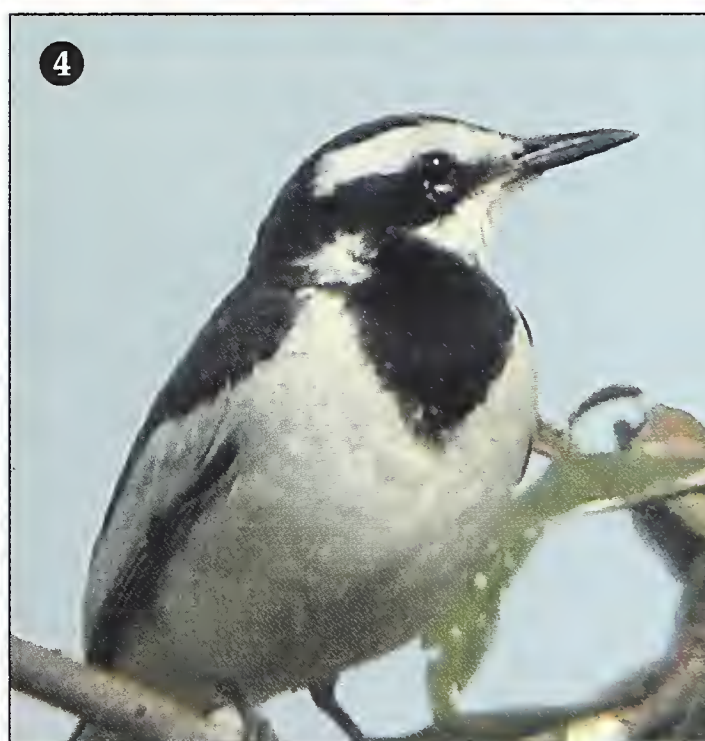
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This issue's Photospot features two birders' favourites: Cinnamon-rumped Trogon *Harpactes orrhophaeus* and White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana*. Both species, especially the latter, are notoriously difficult denizens of the dark forest interior to get good views of, let alone photographs. Martin Hale surely got a fine reward for his patience in the form of these excellent shots – possibly the first ever of Cinnamon-rumped Trogon.

- 1 White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana* by Martin Hale. Gunung Kerinci, Sumatra
- 2 Cinnamon-rumped Trogon *Harpactes orrhophaeus* by Martin Hale. Taman Negara, Malaysia
- Mekong Wagtail *Motacilla sariveasnae* (page 56)
- 3 Photo by Pete Davidson
- 4 Photo by Per Alström



Recently Published

SPECIAL REVIEW

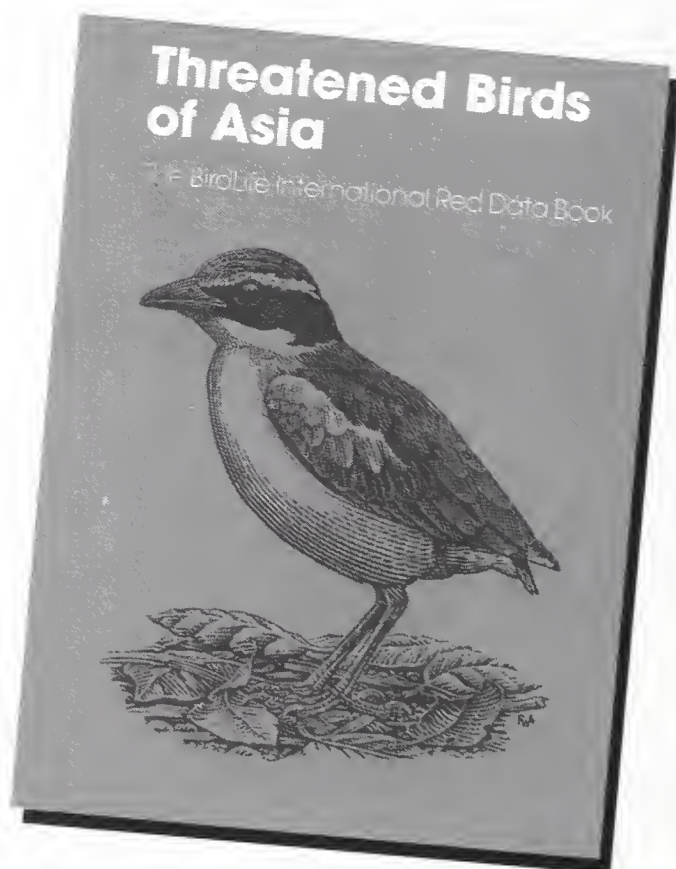
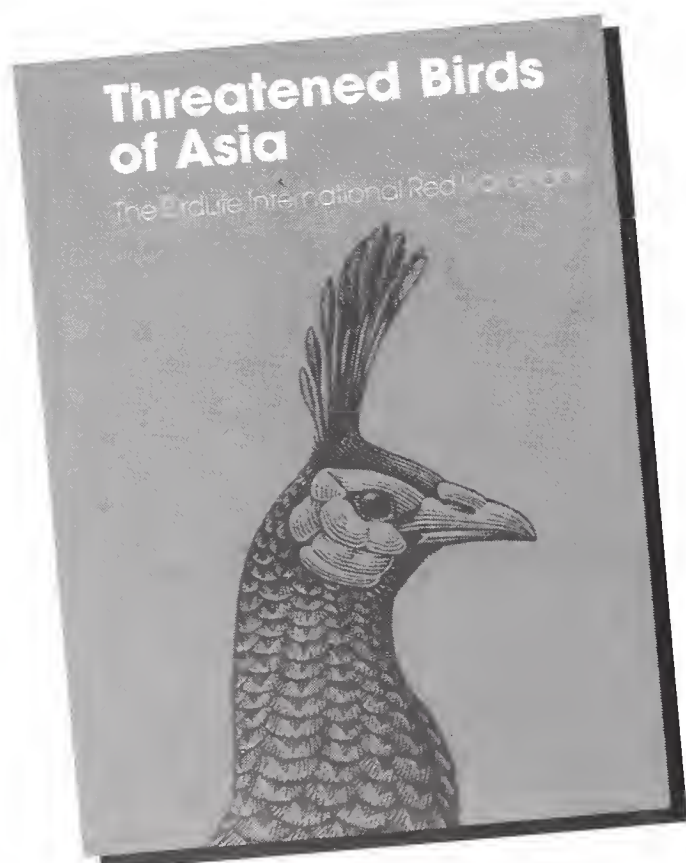
Threatened Birds of Asia: The BirdLife International Red Data Book. *BirdLife International* (editor-in-chief N.J. Collar), Cambridge, U.K., 2001. Part A: xxx + pp. 1-1516; part B: pp. 1517-3028. Hardback £55.00. ISBN 0-946888-44-2 (set).

This is a truly massive tome, totalling over 3,000 pages. It covers 323 Threatened species as well as 23 Data Deficient and one Conservation Dependent species. All these are covered in detail (sometimes immense detail) complete with a range map with actual localities pinpointed (one or two species lack a map). A further 24 Threatened species 'marginal to the region' are treated more briefly (although still in some depth, but without a map) and 317 Near Threatened species have short entries – although still longer and more detailed than in *Birds to Watch 2* (1994). In addition, there is a 115-page Gazetteer, a breakdown of species by territory (i.e. by country) and an 'Analysis' section is reprinted from *Threatened Birds of the Philippines* (1999). And, if that was not enough, there are 7,200 references (including over 400 Russian language, 400

Chinese and more than 250 Japanese publications). There are two colour frontispieces (depicting three Indian *Gyps* vultures and five Sichuan forest endemics) and all the main entries are headed with a black-and-white illustration.

The region covered does not correspond with the Oriental Region, rather it is eastern Asia, including central and eastern Siberia, Mongolia, China, and Pakistan south and east to Wallacea. The size of this work is a reflection of the shocking statistics regarding Asia's birds. The 323 Threatened species represent around 12% of the regional avifauna of 2,700 species, and including the Near Threatened, Data Deficient and Conservation Dependent species, a staggering 25% (664 species) are of conservation concern. Of that total, 41 are considered Critically Endangered, with an estimated 50% chance of surviving the next ten years (indeed, eleven may already be extinct and seven species have a population of fewer than 50 individuals), 65 are Endangered and 217 Vulnerable.

Each species entry is broken down into a standard format. The name is followed by a check-



box system denoting the birds as Critical, Endangered or Vulnerable and giving the codes of the IUCN categories. The black and white vignette lies alongside this, and below is a brief verbal summary of the status and threats. The text is then broken into subheadings. Distribution (by country as appropriate), Population, Ecology (further divided into habitat, food and breeding), Threats, Measures Taken, Measures Proposed and Remarks.

Faced with the size and weight of this work, this reviewer is daunted. Years of work by many individuals have gone into it, and it would clearly take years to read and assimilate all the data (by which time several species may have already disappeared!). In reality, I could only browse a little and try a few species accounts, before putting pen to paper. But I started with one question: why so big? I doubt anyone will read this from cover to cover, and few people will actually read through the whole of some of the longer accounts. To what use would it really be put?

Looking through a selection of species entries gave some clues. The Distributional data appear to be exhaustive, and commendably include recent field observations as well as 'literature' and museum data. But, inevitably with field observations, some are less reliable than others and certainly one or two left me sceptical. But, on balance, the data are far better included than ignored. As with all the material in the species accounts, the authors have been at pains to go back to source for all their statements, rather than quoting secondary material. Unfortunately, the Distribution entries suffer in some cases from a lack of editing. For example, under Rufous-headed Robin a whole series of field observations is listed, with numbers of birds and observers, from the same spot over a ten-year period. These are very 'raw' data indeed and surely there was scope to summarise the information without losing any usefulness?

The Ecology and Population sections are similarly exhaustive but, due to the nature of their subject matter, contain a greater proportion of conjecture than does Distribution. It is astonishing how little is known of the ecology of many Asian birds, and for the species treated this work is now an invaluable reference. Population estimates are

inevitably very difficult for most birds, unless the populations happen to be very small or, like some waterbirds, concentrated into a manageable number of known localities. I have some misgivings about attempting this at all. For example, for Philippine Eagle (a large and fairly well-studied bird) estimates vary from 180 to 3,360 individuals – a pretty wide range. For many passerine species it is extraordinarily difficult to produce a useable figure.

The Threats section makes dismal, but predictable reading. Habitat destruction and degradation, hunting and trapping are all repeated again and again. The entries are well up-to-date, and include, for example, details of the recent massive decline of vultures in India. Measures Taken is largely a list of the protected areas where the species occurs, whilst Measures Proposed is a balanced cocktail of enforcement, protection and research as appropriate. Here the species accounts are cross-referenced so there is not too much repetition of the same details when they relate to a whole suite of species.

The amount of detail, the style of presentation, and the referencing make it clear that this is primarily a work of reference. It cannot be a policy document or a call to arms; it is simply too detailed. (I was recently told that in proposing a major conservation project I should aim to have some nice coloured maps and one side of an A4 page with some snappy 'factlets' and 'soundbites'!) But this is the bedrock upon which such things can be based. On the other hand, for birders and ornithologists it is a truly fantastic source of reference. More facts are accumulated here, in one place, than ever before for almost all of the species concerned – for the maps alone it would be worth the price. And it is a reference to use. For OBC members resident in the region it provides an exhaustive summation of what is known of the rarer species, and hence what can usefully be done in the way of research into distribution, population and ecology. Similarly, for those visiting the region here is a list of target species to find or re-find. At £55.00 this book is stunningly good value. Even better, the text is available to read or download on the Internet (at www.rdb.or.id) so there is really no excuse not to access this information and make use of it!

Simon Harrap

Threatened Birds of the World. *BirdLife International*, 2000. *Lynx Edicions, Barcelona and BirdLife International, Cambridge, UK.* xii + 852 pp. Many colour maps and illustrations. Hardback. £70.00. ISBN 0-946888-39-6.

Twelve percent of the world's known bird species are classed in the IUCN Red Data Book as 'Threatened' – in other words, they are in real danger of extinction over the next hundred years. Of these 1,186 species, 182 are considered 'Critical' – they are thought to stand only a 50% chance of surviving for another ten years. This far exceeds the expected 'background rate' of natural extinction, and for the vast majority of these species, the cause of their decline is human activity in some form or other. Of these threatened birds, some are synonymous with massive conservation efforts, while others are virtually unknown and receive no special protection at all.

This book, which is mainly a detailed review of the status of each of the 1,186 Threatened bird species, is a monumental achievement, made possible by the efforts of BirdLife International and a vast number of contributors. Their aim was to produce a single reference for anyone involved in conservation and land management wherever any of these threatened species occur, offering them both an unflinching overview of the situation as it stands, and suggestions for practical measures which could bring threatened species back from the brink. Each species is beautifully illustrated (with artwork taken from the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* plus various family monographs) and identification points are covered briefly. The species is then described in terms of its current population, distribution and status, the nature of the threats it faces, the level of protection (if any) it and its habitat receives, and the measures which need to be taken to save it from extinction and restore its numbers to a viable level. Following the Threatened species accounts, an additional 727 Near Threatened species are treated more briefly, as well as a small number of species in other lower risk categories. The book concludes with listings of species by territory and an extensive list of references.

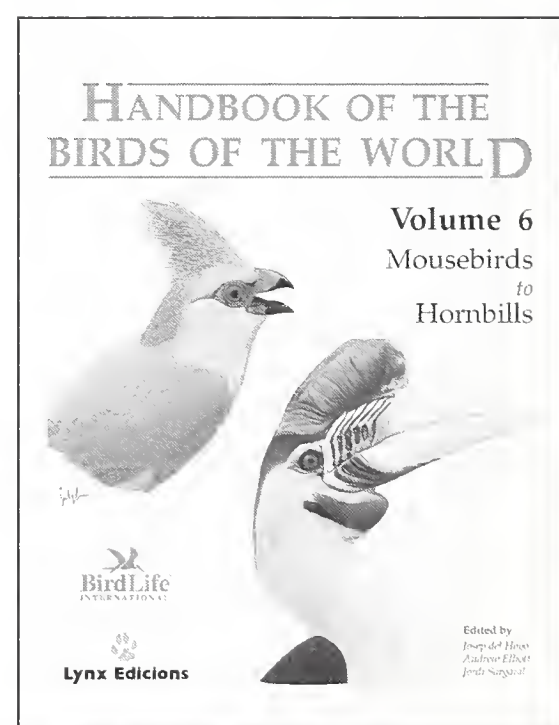
For birds occurring in the Oriental region, this book represents an especially significant achievement, for many of these countries are poorly researched yet have some of the highest concentrations of threatened species – the Philippines has the highest proportion of

threatened endemics in the world (86%). In Indonesia there are well over 100 threatened species, including some that have been discovered recently, such as the Talaud Rail which was only described in 1998. Conservation targets have to take into account the other pressures upon the land where threatened species still survive, particularly in less developed countries where population growth is highest. The importance of raising local awareness and interest is treated as seriously as the need to protect habitat and gather information on ecological requirements. There is an incredible quantity of information in these pages and, with its highly attractive presentation and detailed introductory sections, it is a 'must-have' title for all serious birders and ornithologists, provided they own a shelf strong enough to support it!

Marianne Taylor

Handbook of the Birds of the World. Volume 6: Mousebirds to Hornbills. Edited by Josep del Hoyo, Andrew Elliott and Jordi Sargatal. *Lynx Edicions, Barcelona*, 2001. 589 pp. 44 colour plates, many colour photographs. Hardback £110.00. ISBN 84-87334-30-X.

Volume six starts with an informative and lengthy chapter on Avian Bioacoustics that covers not only vocalisations, but also other sounds made by birds, such as the drumming of snipe. This essay is comprehensive, discussing for example, how such sounds are produced, individual variation and dialects, function and evolution, and the increasingly important contribution that



knowledge of bioacoustics brings to our understanding of avian taxonomy.

The sixth volume in this series was ambitiously planned to cover the bird groups from mousebirds to woodpeckers, but due to the abundance of material and information on many of the taxa concerned, the volume was divided into two. This appears to have been a good decision, since the present volume does not in any way suggest a reduction in standard or indeed of size compared to the first five volumes. This volume covers the mousebirds, trogons, and the Coraciiformes, a large grouping that includes some widespread species important in Asian ornithology; the kingfishers, bee-eaters, rollers and hornbills. One consequence of the decision to reduce the number of species covered in this volume is the inclusion of more photographs on these particular groups than would have been possible with the original plan. As usual, the range and quality of photographs is breathtaking, with the great majority clearly taken in natural situations (*Actenoides* kingfishers and two of the trogons appear to be exceptions).

The text is fairly up-to-date; for example, reproducing the range map for Plain-pouched Hornbill used by Rasmussen (2000) and hence correcting the 'certain' range depicted by Kemp (1995) that included most of Thailand and central Burma. Whether this species occurs in Sumatra, which is still a possibility given the difficulty of identification in the field, remains to be clarified. Whilst the text takes account of the recent work on Plain-pouched and Wreathed Hornbills, the hornbill plates unfortunately fail to depict the yellow-pouched variant of the female Wreathed Hornbill. One is, nevertheless, clearly visible (using a magnifying glass) in the photograph of a roost of Wreathed Hornbills on page 450.

Despite an attempt to keep the text as up-to-date as possible, there are inevitable errors and some recent literature was presumably too new to include. One oversight, for example, is that there is no mention of the fact that there are historical records of very large flocks of Rhinoceros Hornbills – sadly, these kind of sightings appear to be a thing of the past, especially with the ominous but credible prediction by Derek Holmes that most lowland and hill forests in the Indonesian part of the Sundaic region will be lost by the year 2010 (World Bank 2000). In a recent paper by Anggraini *et al.* (2000) the long-held belief that Helmeted and Rhinoceros Hornbills are strictly territorial is

challenged, with the suggestion that these birds exhibit facultative territoriality; though one wonders whether recent changes in forest cover and forest fires have displaced many hornbills, hence affecting observed behaviour. It is also worth noting that the work on Sumba Hornbill by Juhaeni on which the account for this species in HBW is based, is apparently highly suspect (M. Kinnaird pers. comm.).

Another consequence of dividing the volume was presumably that more taxa of the groups covered could be illustrated than might have been possible originally. These illustrations, often of taxa not illustrated in other available literature, is one of the most interesting aspects of the series. Quick perusal of plates showing the remarkable variation that is apparent in some species provide encouragement and stimulus to those interested in taxonomic challenge, and at the same time highlights one weaker aspect of parts of this volume.

For example, one cannot help wondering if the 19 illustrated subspecies (of 49 treated) of Collared Kingfisher and 10 (of 14) illustrated subspecies of Variable Kingfisher can really belong under the umbrella of a single species. Indeed, the taxonomic treatment of kingfishers is conservative and perhaps represents a lost opportunity to re-evaluate earlier taxonomic treatments (e.g. Fry *et al.* 1992); though one advance with the bee-eaters is that *Merops philippinensis* is recognised in HBW, whilst it was lumped with *M. superciliosus* in Fry *et al.* (1992). In contrast, the taxonomy of the trogons demonstrates an effort to review previous treatments, with the splitting of Blue-tailed Trogon into Javan and Sumatran endemic species, both of which are included in the resurrected genus *Apalharpactes* rather than *Harpactes*. I was also encouraged to see the magnificent and unique Helmeted Hornbill reinstated in the monotypic genus *Rhinoplax*, rather than included in *Buceros*, as it has been in some recent treatments, following Kemp & Woodcock (1995).

When the taxonomy of HBW is compared with that of the OBC Checklist there are a considerable number of differences. For the hornbills, for example, HBW recognises both Austen's Brown Hornbill and Tickell's Brown Hornbill, which are lumped by Inskipp *et al.* (1996). Talaud Kingfisher, a taxon that is lumped with Collared Kingfisher in the OBC Checklist, is recognised as a distinct species, *Todiramphus enigma*, by HBW, although the basis for this particular split in published

literature is still rather weak. The statement that “the two [*enigma* and *chloris*] occur together without interbreeding” in the section on taxonomy seems to me to be poorly documented with certainty. There are, inevitably, also differences in the use of English names that may irritate some readers. For example, hornbill nomenclature differs from that used by OBC, with different English names of some Philippine species of Tarictic Hornbill *Penelopides* spp. and with Indian Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros coronatus*, which is called Malabar Pied Hornbill in the OBC list.

One disappointing aspect of this book, and indeed the majority of bird books, is that the maps showing distribution are very general, merely indicating the countries and approximate area in which a species occurs. Whilst rather time consuming, it would be far more interesting to present maps that, where feasible, showed the present range of a species based on its known habitat availability. This would bring to the attention of readers the seriously fragmented nature of the distribution of so many birds, especially in parts of the Asian region where forest bird populations are increasingly isolated from each other, with no possibility of genetic exchange. For example, in HBW the range of Rufous-headed Hornbill *Aceros waldeni* is shown as the entire islands of Negros, Panay and Guimaras, which is a gross misrepresentation of the facts.

In contrast to the first volumes in the series, the species texts provide some information on voice of all species; whilst this will be welcomed by many readers, and might prove to be useful, the range of vocalisations for many species cannot possibly be expressed in such a short space. Perhaps a more useful contribution would be the provision of sonagrams that illustrate the differences in voice between species or even subspecies where this has relevance to taxonomic decisions.

Whilst there are minor mistakes and oversights, such as some of those mentioned above, these are inevitable in a book of this nature. So I should stress that, overall, Volume 6 of HBW is an impressive piece of work and will prove to be a useful source of reference for anyone interested in Oriental ornithology. Whilst I am sure that it will inevitably be available as a CD-Rom at some point in the future, the sheer magnificence of the photographs should convince most readers who can afford it that this is

something worth adding to your bird book collection.

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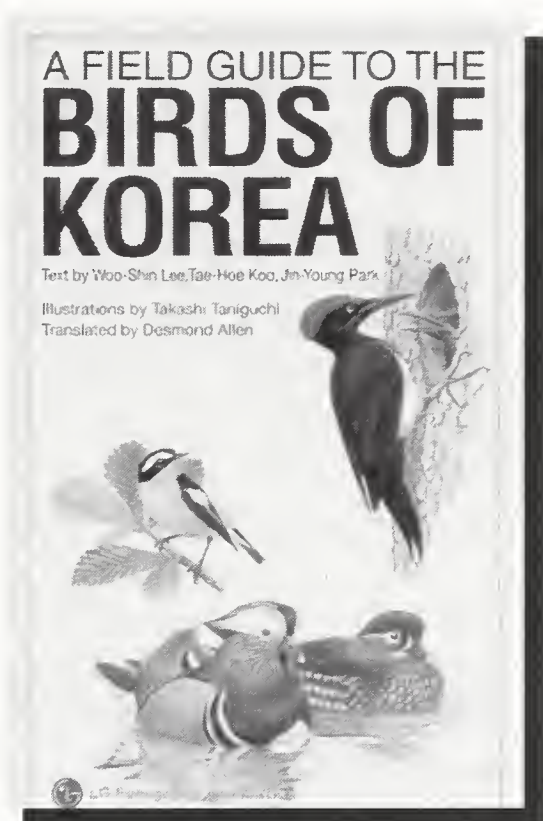
Frank Lambert

A Field Guide to the Birds of Korea. By Woo-Shin Lee, Tae-Hoe Koo and Jin-Young Park. Illustrated by Takashi Taniguchi. Translated by Desmond Allen. LG Evergreen Foundation, Seoul, 2000. 328 pp. 120 colour plates. Paperback. ISBN 89-951415-0-6.

Korea is a country that is now finally getting the attention it deserves from visiting birders. It's a country that is well developed, easy to travel around and most importantly has a host of good birds. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Korea* is the first true English language field guide to the birds of Korea and as such will be of great interest to prospective visitors, not only to Korea, but also adjacent countries in NE Asia, where good English language field guides are still lacking.

It comes from the same stable as the Chinese-language Taiwanese field guide and the *Field Guide to the Waterbirds of Asia*, so it is produced to a high standard and uses the excellent illustrations of Takashi Taniguchi. I'm a big fan of Taniguchi; he has a very different style from what we have now come to expect from the new generation of guides being produced by European artists, but I think it works really well both aesthetically and, more importantly, for identification purposes.

Where the book is most let down is in the text. It is scant and at best variable, and perhaps the most useful advice is, if in doubt, ignore it and look at the illustrations. However, we have to realise that this is billed as a translation (and having been involved in one such project I know how difficult that is). The primary aim of this book



has to be a Korean guide for a Korean audience and we should be grateful to the publisher and translators for bringing us an English version. If an interest in birdwatching and bird conservation is to advance in a country like Korea it is local language guides such as this that will play a critical role. To quote from the foreword of the book (written by the chairman of the Korean foundation that funded it): 'Hopefully, it will help to encourage more people – especially our youth – to come to love birds, enjoy birdwatching, and develop a greater interest in preserving nature.' I can only concur, and hope that he goes one step further to ensure that the Korean version is available at a reasonable price in every decent bookstore in Korea.

Maps seem to be a recurring issue in OBC reviews, so this one is no different. Why oh why in a field guide to Korea do they produce maps that show ranges throughout Asia? For no-one using this as a field guide is it particularly relevant where in SE Asia a particular wader winters or where in the Russian Arctic it breeds. The ranges that are mapped for the rest of the region are often woefully inaccurate, and anyone with even a rudimentary knowledge of bird distributions in SE Asia will be able to rack up a large list of anomalies for themselves. And why on earth don't they shade any passage ranges? If the wintering range of Dunlin is mapped, why not the passage range? This is a major omission.

Korea (at least in the South) is probably one of the few countries in the region where there are enough data to produce good maps, and on the whole the national distributions published here

are excellent. What we really want to see in field guide maps for Korea are things like what islands Japanese Wood Pigeon (or as it's referred to here, Black Wood Pigeon – but I don't want to open up the issue of English names) is known from, or the extent of the little-known breeding distribution of Japanese Robin in the DPR Korea? That information is all here, but the scale is so ridiculous that with the naked eye it's hardly discernable. Next time I hope the publishers will fill those postage stamp-sized squares with a map just of Korea and a little adjacent territory, then people will actually be able to use them for what they were intended.

Finally, one thing that this field guide deserves major applause for is the way it's been 'packaged'. Admittedly it only deals with 450 species, but it is perfect for field use - compact (without the birds being too small on the plate) and well bound, on quality paper, with a soft but tough laminated cover making it both durable and flexible. It means not only will it take the abuse we all throw at true field guides, but you can actually fit it in your pocket and carry it around all day without it causing you to stoop or limp.

This is a major contribution to both birding and bird conservation in the region. It is not an identification text in the league of say Robson's *Field Guide to the Birds of South-east Asia* or Grimmett *et al.*'s *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*, but it makes no pretence to be so. For those interested in subspecific identification they will still have to turn to such more authoritative texts. However, for the foreseeable future this should be the first choice for the field pocket of all travelling English-speaking birders, not only in Korea, but also at Beidahe and throughout NE China, as well as probably Japan and Taiwan.

Colin Poole

Key Conservation Sites in the Philippines. By Neil Aldrin D Mallari, Blas R Tabaranza Jr and Michael J Crosby. Haribon Foundation and BirdLife International, 2001. Published by Bookmark, Inc., Makati City, Manila, Philippines. 486pp. Paperback. ISBN 971-569-405-5.

The islands of the Philippines are not only one of the most endemic-rich areas on earth but are also one of the most threatened – a fact widely acknowledged by the global conservation organisations. As a result the *Threatened Birds of the Philippines* was rushed out ahead of the Asian



Red Data Book, and now this book has come out preceding the Important Bird Area (IBA) book for the whole of Asia.

The introductory chapters give a summary of the process of IBA selection and the history and current status of nature conservation in the Philippines, and are followed by a useful series of 25 colour maps showing the location and approximate boundaries of the 117 'Key Conservation Sites'. There then follows the meat of the book with the texts for each of the selected sites (these are interspersed with decorative, though highly inaccurate, line drawings). They provide a useful summary of what is known for each of the sites including details of conservation status, habitats, important birds present, other interesting flora and fauna, and conservation threats. For those sites that are generally well known, the information is fairly up-to-date and accurate. However, what soon becomes painfully obvious is just how little up-to-date data there are from the more obscure areas. Away from the sites on the general 'birding circuits' recent information is close to non-existent. Often it is not even known if the habitats are still intact, let alone whether the birds that were historically recorded from the areas still occur. The sections on conservation threats make for depressing (and repetitive!) reading, and here lies my only gripe. How much good do these books do? Even the national parks are being destroyed at an alarming rate and I can only hope against hope that this book will serve its purpose and persuade the powers that be of the need not only to designate a network of key conservation areas (the easy bit), but also to maintain and protect them.

A mine of information, this book should be applauded as much for pointing out how little

current knowledge there is for much of the Philippines, as for the (often historic) information it presents. Anyone with an interest in the avifauna of these fascinating islands (especially visiting birders) should consult this book for inspiration. The gauntlet has been laid down – why not pick an interesting Key Conservation Site and go exploring? Isabela Orioles, Green-faced Parrotfinches and Miniature Tit-Babblers await the more adventurous!

Pete Morris

Wildlife in Lao PDR: 1999 status report. By J.W. Duckworth, R. E. Salter, and K. Khounboline. IUCN–The World Conservation Union, Wildlife Conservation Society, and Centre for Protected Areas and Watershed Management, Vientiane, 1999. xiv + 275 pp. 18 double-page colour plates. Paperback. No price. ISBN 2-8317-0483-9.

The Wildlife Conservation Society and IUCN have worked resolutely in the past decade to generate data on the status and distribution of the fauna and habitats of Laos. *Forktail* has been a repeated witness to this process as it affects birds. Now this information has been combined in a magnificent overview and update in a telephone-directory-sized paperback which describes the geography and biogeography of the country, the human use of wildlife, and the infrastructure of conservation. There are 24 pages on reptiles and amphibians, 59 on large mammals, 19 on selected small mammals and, as the centrepiece, 90 pages on birds (by J. W. Duckworth, P. Davidson and R. J. Timmins). Eighteen double-page spreads of colour photographs enhance the text, although the two devoted to birds are disappointing.

The bird section consists mainly of an annotated list of all species recorded in Laos. Each species entry starts with a condensed summary of status, distribution, sources, habitat and elevation, followed generally by a few lines of discussion (sometimes up to a quarter of a page). There is an extensive tabulation of the distribution of 'key species' (defined by various types of elevated conservation status) within what are in effect key areas (mostly National Biodiversity Conservation Areas).

This study is a wonderful achievement of compression and comprehensiveness. Every serious Asian bird student should have one; and every South-East Asian country should undertake a similar review.

N. J. Collar

Birds of Bhutan. By Carol Inskipp, Tim Inskipp and Richard Grimmett. Christopher Helm, London, 1999. 192 pp. 70 colour plates. Paperback £16.99. ISBN 0-7136-5163-6.

Birds of Nepal. By Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp. Christopher Helm, London, 2000. 288 pp. 110 colour plates. Paperback £19.99. ISBN 0-7136-5166-0.

These two books have been condensed from the same authors' monumental classic *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Basically using the illustrations from the 'mother' work but with texts reduced to a plate captions-style layout, these two books are essential for field work in their respective Himalayan regions, being both comprehensive in their coverage yet sensibly softback and reduced in size to fit the pocket.

The 'text facing plates' layout limits the amount of space available for each species, which in some cases is hardly adequate for identification for several of the trickier genera. This has been overcome in the later Nepal volume by the inclusion of a series of tables allowing more detailed comparison of difficult groups such as warblers and rosefinches. Perhaps more of these could be included in later editions, for example: vultures and accipiters.

Like the authors' earlier book, the Sibley & Monroe classification sequence is followed, which is hardly user-friendly to the average birder and is quite frustrating when trying to check up on a few points quickly in the field – the layout of the books could be improved by having an

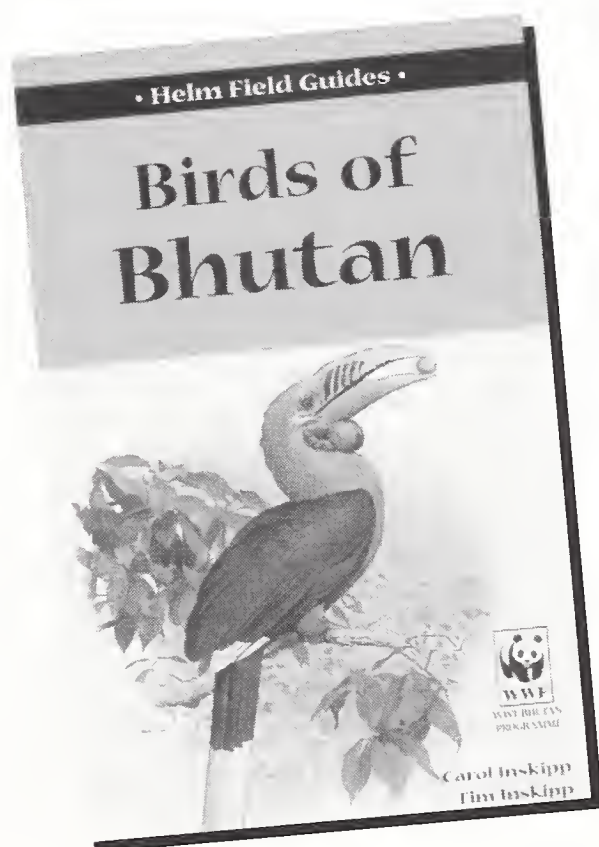
alphabetical list of families immediately inside the cover to help speed-up this process.

All regularly occurring species are shown for both countries, with those recorded on only a handful of occasions being relegated to an appendix without illustrations (although their texts are quite adequate for identification). Prior to the main systematic part of the book are a number of useful introductory chapters outlining the main habitats and conservation issues of each country, as well as some suggested itineraries and a selection of the main ornithological sites. Overall, these two books have gone beyond being mere 'spin-off' publications and are now excellent standard guides to their respective countries.

Steve Madge

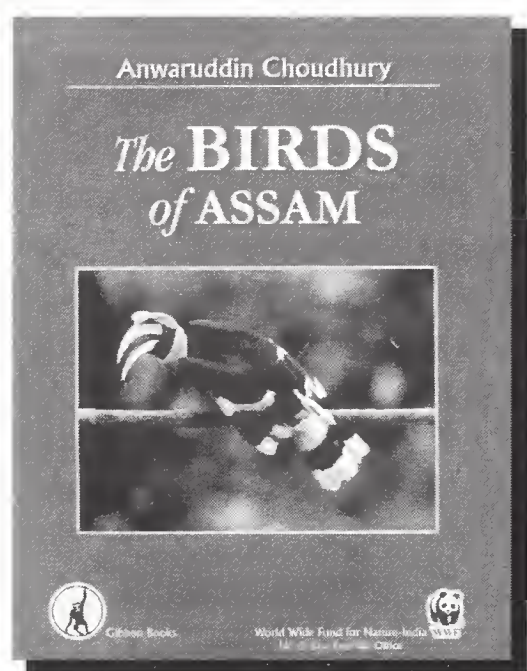
Birds of Pune. Compiled by Anchal Sondhi. Illustrated by D. M. Thumber, Mukesh Acharaya, Vijay Shrimali, Carl De Silva, Sanjeev Nalavade, Pratibha Pande, Dilip Patil, Peeyush Sekhsaria, Andhal Sondhi. Kalpavriksh/Centre for Environment Education, Pune, 2001. 136 pp. 10 colour plates, c. 140 line drawings, 10 maps. Rs. 50.

Over 400 bird species have been recorded in the varied habitats of wetlands, grasslands, forests, forts and ghats in Pune district, Maharashtra, India. This excellent small book provides a comprehensive bird checklist of Pune district, annotated with species status and references for the rarer species. There are lifelike illustrations, some in full colour, for a hundred of the more



common birds of the district and these are accompanied by useful identification notes. Detailed information is given about the many birdwatching areas in the district including sections on how to get there and birdwatching tips, as well maps for the more important sites. In addition there is a well-written section introducing birdwatching, which is illustrated throughout by attractive line drawings. This is a handy guide for both the beginner and more experienced birdwatcher with an interest in Indian birds.

Carol Inskipp



The Birds of Assam. By Anwaruddin Choudhury. Gibbon Books, c/o H. Choudhury, Islampur Road, Guwahati, 781 007 and WWF-India, North-East Regional Office, Guwahati 781 007, Assam, India. 2000. 240pp, 64 photographs, 186 drawings and 159 maps. Paperback. Rs 295, \$11, £8. ISBN 81-900866-2-6.

Assam, one of the most ornithologically rich and fascinating of Indian states, is also one of the least well known. Since fragmentary exploration of the region by a few naturalists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (principally Baker, Godwin Austen, Hume, Inglis and Stevens), no major work has dealt with Assam's birds. Nevertheless, an enormous amount has been learnt about its avifauna in recent decades as a result of increasingly frequent visits by travelling naturalists and a growing band of resident field biologists. Amongst the latter, Anwaruddin Choudhury is one of the most active and committed. He has gone a long way to addressing the shortage of recent published information by producing this impressive guide.

Although the title might suggest a field guide, the book's emphasis lies in the status, distribution and conservation of species. The line drawings that do much to enliven the old-fashioned text are rather old-fashioned themselves, the photographs are very poorly reproduced, while brief and dated descriptions are only provided for those few species that warrant full accounts (58 of the 820 species named in the updated state checklist, to be precise). A further 61 species are treated in a shorter format (in a section entitled 'Selected Species Notes'), while the remaining 700 or so species are restricted to a single annotated line in the checklist. The nomenclature and taxonomy are also somewhat out-of-date, largely following Ali & Ripley's *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan*.

The allocation of species to each of these three treatments seems to be rather haphazard, the fullest coverage tending to be reserved for the larger, rarer or more distinctive species, while warblers, babblers, chats, flycatchers and the like tend to be demoted to relative anonymity. This is a shame as the information provided in the most complete accounts is detailed and fascinating. It includes local names, a valuable section on distribution (arranged by district or sites, with accompanying state maps and a round-up of recent records for many species), a pedestrian section on ecology (often cribbed from Baker/Ali and Ripley), and very useful sections on population (many with tabulated count data or other numerical estimates) as well as conservation status, threats and the proposed actions required to safeguard each species. Brief introductory sections on topics such as history, habitats, migration and hunting are packed with interesting information, including a sobering account of the various ingenious techniques employed by Assamese people to trap and kill birds for food or trade. Appendices list wetlands and protected areas (along with grid references), while the bibliography provides an excellent source of references for the state.

Mistakes of a non-grammatical nature are seemingly quite scarce, the most frequent being repetitions of historical errors, such as Godwin Austen's record of Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra* in North Cachar Hills district, and mention of Hume's record of Dark-rumped Swift *Apus acuticauda* from the Andamans and Baker's record of Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* breeding in Tibet. Disregarding these minor oversights, this book is an important

step forward for ornithological knowledge and bird conservation in Assam, a state that supports crucial populations of several large waterbirds and grassland specialists. It can be heartily recommended to those interested in birds and their conservation in India, or anyone planning a visit to the north-eastern states.

Joe Tobias

A Bibliographic Index to the Ornithology of the Indian Subcontinent. By Aasheesh Pittie. (asheesh@hdl.vsnl.net.in). CD-Rom.

This valuable resource includes about 18,000 references covering the ornithology of India and the surrounding countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Tibet). It comes on a CD-Rom that includes the program Papyrus Retriever. Using this programme it is possible to list the references in different ways or to search for one or more of the many keywords that the compiler has appended to the references. The results can be exported in various ways, allowing one to list all the references for a particular subject, person, species or country/Indian state. Although the keywords cover all the geographical area(s) pertaining to each reference the species information is necessarily limited to those mentioned in the titles. Expansion of this system to cover all species contained in the text of every reference would be a massive task, but an even more invaluable resource if achievable. This bibliography is far superior to Burg *et al.* (1994, *Ornithology of the Indian Subcontinent 1872-1992: an annotated bibliography*), which was reviewed in OBC Bulletin 21: 59-60. The compiler deserves congratulations and support for this splendid effort.

Tim Inskipp

A Photographic Guide to Birds of Sri Lanka. By Gehan de Silva Wijeyeratne, Deepal Warakagoda and T.S.U. de Zylva. New Holland, London, 2000. 144 pp. 276 colour photographs. Paperback £7.99. ISBN 1-85974-511-3.

OBC members will probably by now be familiar with the New Holland series of single country photographic guides. This new addition to the Oriental titles is a marvellous collection of stunning photographs. This is largely a testament to the patience and skill of T. S. U. de Zylva, many

of whose images appear here for the first time, although numerous other photographers have also contributed some of their best shots. How nice it is to be able to revel in the gloriously colourful plumage of the likes of Sri Lankan Blue Magpie and Crimson-fronted Barbet, or examine at leisure the feather detail on a Brown Wood Owl or Common Woodshrike. Now we can at last answer the question as to how green the bill of Green-billed Coucal really is, compare both local races of Greater Racket-tailed Drongo or check to see if the field guides have shown the correct iris colour of Orange-billed Babbler.

The authors, among the most respected names in Sri Lankan ornithology, have also done an excellent job of encapsulating useful information in the short paragraphs which accompany each photograph. Although any birder visiting the island is recommended to take a full field guide as the primary source to be consulted (the current favourite being the work by Harrison and Worfolk), this slim pocket volume will not take up much luggage space and should prove an invaluable additional reference.

As with other books in the series, some 250 bird species are illustrated in colour photographs, with both sexes shown in a few cases. This accounts for a relatively high percentage of the country's total avifauna compared with the titles for other countries. A first attempt at a complete photographic guide to all of Sri Lanka's birds surely lies within the capabilities of the authors, photographers and publisher. Will they take up the challenge?

Krys Kazmierczak

Pigeons and Doves: A Guide to the Pigeons and Doves of the World. By David Gibbs, Eustace Barnes and John Cox. Pica Press. 2001. 615 pp, 76 colour plates, 319 maps. Hardback £38.00. ISBN 1-873403-60-7.

This book covers 318 species of pigeons and doves including three historically extinct species: the Dodo and the Réunion and Rodrigues Solitaires.

There is a very brief and rather superficial introduction followed by the plates and the species accounts. The plates are of a high standard and mostly very pleasing though I noticed that some of the Afrotropical and New World species are a little less accurate than those from the Palearctic, Oriental and Australasian regions. For example, White-winged Collared Dove

Streptopelia reichenowi inexplicably lacks the white outer wing-coverts which give the species its vernacular name, as well as the prominent white orbital ring surrounding the pale yellow iris. My suspicions that the treatment of Afrotropical species was not all that it should be was heightened when I noticed that some of the references in the text were missing from the Bibliography. The maps followed a similar trend; most of the Middle Eastern range of Laughing Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis* is not mapped despite being mentioned in the text, and the Socotran race is given subspecific status but is not mapped for Socotra.

Almost all pigeons and doves have highly characteristic vocalisations which provide both a means of identification as well as an indication of presence, particularly among forest dwelling species which are more often heard than seen. Given that it is virtually impossible to transcribe some of these sounds adequately in the text (just look at the authors' struggle with the *Treron* species) it is unfortunate that an accompanying CD was not included.

Over one-third of the species included occur within the Oriental region and these generally receive more detailed treatment than Afrotropical and New World species, no doubt a reflection of David Gibbs' experience in the area. References are up-to-date and are all included in the Bibliography. The colour plates of green pigeons, fruit doves and *Ducula* pigeons are amongst the best in the book. I would certainly recommend this book despite its flaws, particularly if one's main areas of interest are in the Oriental or Australasian zoogeographical areas.

Iain Robertson

Thrushes. By Peter Clement and Ren Hathway. Christopher Helm, London, 2000. 463 pp, 60 colour plates, maps and line drawings. Hardback £35.00. ISBN 0-7136-3940-7.

This delightful volume follows the familiar format and style of the Helm Identification Guide series. The first book devoted to thrushes to be published for over a century, it covers 162 species of true

thrushes, which are depicted by approximately 540 figures illustrating adults, immatures and most distinctive races of all but one long extinct species. Most of these illustrations are truly superb both in accuracy and in conveying a life-like jizz. The colour reproduction is generally excellent though in my copy the orange/red tones on plates 29 & 30, depicting African *Turdus* species, seem much too bright. One minor but rather annoying fault is that the numbering of the species on the plate does not follow the sequence of the accompanying text; indeed on plate 22 (solitaires), it is actually reversed. Given that the plates are not crowded it would surely be possible to place the figures in numerical sequence.

The introductory chapters deal with classification, taxonomy and relationships, the genera of thrushes, use of English names, topography, voice and vocalisations, behaviour, the historical record, future research and conservation of scarce thrushes, and threats/extinctions. These sections are accompanied by many fine line drawings.

A third of the species in the book have occurred in the Oriental region as defined by the OBC. The sequence and taxonomy follows Sibley & Monroe and the OBC Checklist, the splitting of Horsfield's Thrush *Zoothera horsfieldi* from White's Thrush *Z. dauma* being the only taxonomic deviation from the OBC Checklist.

The species accounts are very thorough and well researched. The descriptions are extensive, covering sexual, age and geographical variations in detail. One has only to look at the accounts of the 52 races of Island Thrush *Turdus poliocephalus* to see how much work was involved. The sections on Voice, Status and Distribution, Movements, Habitat, Behaviour, Breeding and Measurements are equally detailed. The eleven pages of references testify to the amount of research undertaken by the authors.

This is a superb book which automatically becomes the standard reference work on the subject. Dealing with some of the commonest and most familiar birds as well as some rare and secretive skulkers about which we have much to learn, it will be a constant source of reference and enjoyment for any birder.

Iain Robertson



From the Field

Compiled by Craig Robson

These are largely unconfirmed records covering the period from August 2000–October 2001. We urge that if they have not already done so, contributors provide full details to the relevant regional organisations in due course.

AUSTRALIA

Christmas Island

Three vagrants were recorded on the island in March (EE, GL), an immature **Drongo Cuckoo** *Surniculus lugubris* by the Rumah Tinggi Tavern on 6th, an adult **Little Heron** *Butorides striatus* at Anderson Dale on 6th, and a **Brown Shrike** *Lanius cristatus* by the High School on 4th.

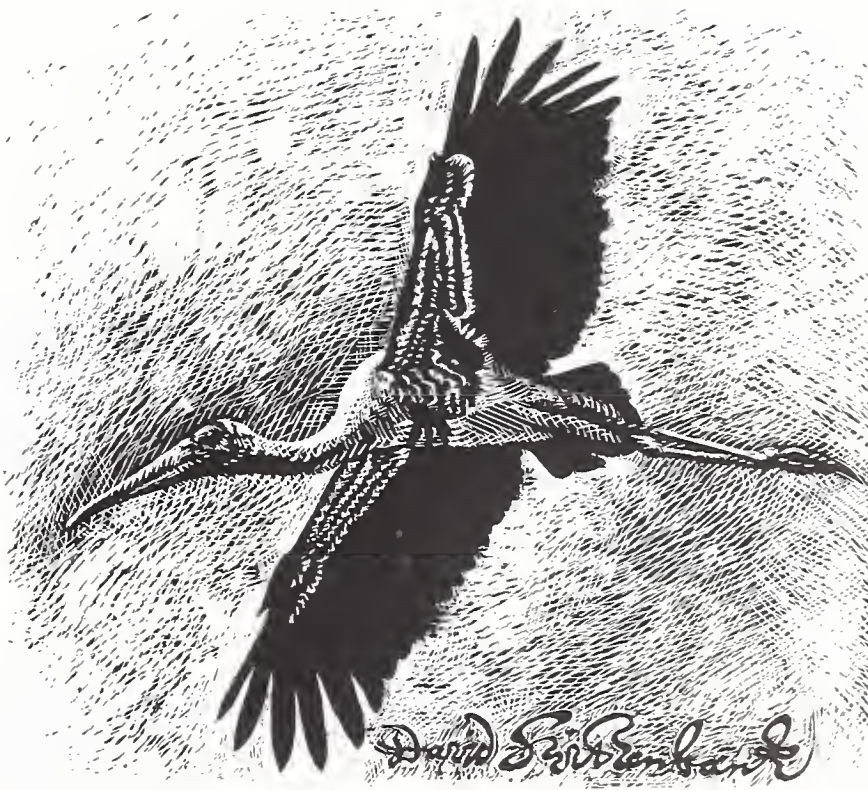
BHUTAN

Three new species for the country were seen in March (SM, RW-Limosa/Field Guides tour): at least three **Hill Pigeons** *Columba rupestris* and a male **Pied Wheatear** *Oenanthe pleschanka* near Paro on 20th and a single **Brown-breasted Flycatcher** *Muscicapa muttui* near Samdrup Jongkhar on 31st. Other interesting recent sightings have included two **Greylag Geese** *Anser anser* at Punakha on 21st March (SM, RW-Limosa/Field Guides tour), **Spot-billed Duck** *Anas poecilorhyncha* near Paro on 20th March (SM, RW-Limosa/Field Guides tour), a male **Falcated Duck** *A. falcata* near Paro on 30th March (SM, RW-Limosa/Field Guides tour), the second record from Bhutan, a single **Red-crested Pochard** *Rhodonessa rufina* at Babesa, near Thimphu on 13th April (DF/Birdquest), five **Northern Lapwings** *Vanellus vanellus* in the Phobjika Valley on 22nd March (SM, RW-Limosa/Field Guides tour), a calling **Hooded Pitta** *Pitta sordida* along the Limithang Road (c.1,800 m elevation) on 26th April (DF/Birdquest), and five **Hume's Warblers** *Phylloscopus humei*, believed to be of the race *mandelli*, near Kanglung, just south of Tashigang (1,850 m) on 24th April (DF/Birdquest). Also of note were a pair of **Wedge-billed Wren Babblers** *Sphenocichla humei* along the Limithang Road (2,000 m) on 19th April (PH/Sunbird, DB/VENT, DF/Birdquest), a single **Brown-throated Fulvetta** *Alcippe ludlowi* on the Karung La, near Wamrong (2,500 m) on 23rd April (DF/Birdquest), a minor range extension c.30 km south-westwards, and a group of five **Grey-headed Bullfinches** *Pyrrhula*

erythaca along the Limithang Road (2,900 m) on 18th April (DF/Birdquest). Four **Black-necked Cranes** *Grus nigricollis* were still present on their wintering grounds in the Phobjika Valley on 22nd March (SM, RW-Limosa/Field Guides tour).

CAMBODIA

An offshore survey for cetaceans in April (YB, PD, IB, ER, IR, SRi, LS, PSe) resulted in some amazing bird sightings. An incredible minimum of 174 jaegers were recorded, with most being adults in full breeding plumage, following a migration corridor which covered a c.10 km wide track, commencing just offshore from Koh Rong/Koh Rong Samlem. Almost all birds were heading south-east. At least 20 **Parasitic Jaegers** *Stercorarius parasiticus* were recorded offshore, from Koh Krussat south to the southern tip of Koh Rong Samlem, and another in Kompong Som Bay during on 23rd–26th, and at least 44 **Long-tailed Jaegers** *S. longicaudus* were seen on six different dates between 20th–28th, from the north end of Koh Kong island south to Koh Tang and Koh Polou-Wai (PD *et al.*). Both species are new for Cambodia. Of all the jaegers recorded, c.18% were



Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala* by David Swithenbank

Pomarine *S. pomarinus*, c.12% **Parasitic**, c.25% **Long-tailed**, and c.45% were unidentified. Further surveys later in the year will elucidate whether any of these birds are wintering in the Gulf of Thailand, or merely passage migrants. The surveys also turned-up three other new pelagic species for Cambodia: At least one adult **Aleutian Tern** *Sterna aleutica* in breeding plumage, flying past the survey boat on three occasions on 24th, c.10 km west of Koh Rong, and a very similarly-plumaged bird (seen poorly but probably this species) later the same day, flying south-east c.2 km south-west of Koh Rong (PD,IB,ER,IR,SRI,LS,PSe), an adult female **Christmas Island Frigatebird** *Fregata andrewsi*, with five **Lesser Frigatebirds** *F. ariel*, photographed over the north end of Koh Tang on 23rd (PD *et al.*), and **Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus* off the south-west coast, from Ilot Krusovie (c.20 km off the southern tip of Koh Kong) south to Koh Polou-Wai, with three between Koh Tang and Koh Polou-Wai on 21st, one off Koh Rong Samlem on 24th, a flock of c.20 just south-east of Ilot Krusovie on 26th, and two c.15 km north of there on 27th (PD,IB,ER,IR,SRI,LS,PSe). Regarding the latter, at least four or five birds in the flock of c.20 were immatures, and it is interesting to speculate on whether the species breeds on some of Cambodia's offshore islands, now that it is no longer breeding on islands off the coast of nearby SE Thailand. Interesting records of migrants on Koh Tang during 20th–23rd April (PD,IB,ER,IR,SRI,LS,PSe) included two **Oriental Cuckoos** *Cuculus saturatus*, a single **Crow-billed Drongo** *Dicrurus annectans* (seen well out at sea), several **Eyebrowed Thrushes** *Turdus obscurus*, and a single **Dark-sided Flycatcher** *Muscicapa sibirica*. Further brief surveys at sea in July (PD *et al.*) were less productive, though the largest number of frigatebirds from the area to date was recorded, with at least 80 birds south and east of Koh Tang on 23rd–24th July, including at least 25 **Lesser** and at least four **Christmas Island**. Also of interest during these latter surveys were at least 60 **Bridled Terns** *Sterna anaethetus* on 23rd July off Koh Tang, including several juveniles, and up to 20 birds hanging in the wind over a small rocky islet off Kampot on 26th July, on which there was a fair amount of guano, suggesting that breeding was taking place. Other new species for the country during the current period under review have included at least five **Nicobar Pigeons** *Caloenas nicobarica* on a small islet just south-east of Koh Tang on 21st April



White-shouldered Ibis *Pseudibis davisoni*
by Hil Bruinsma

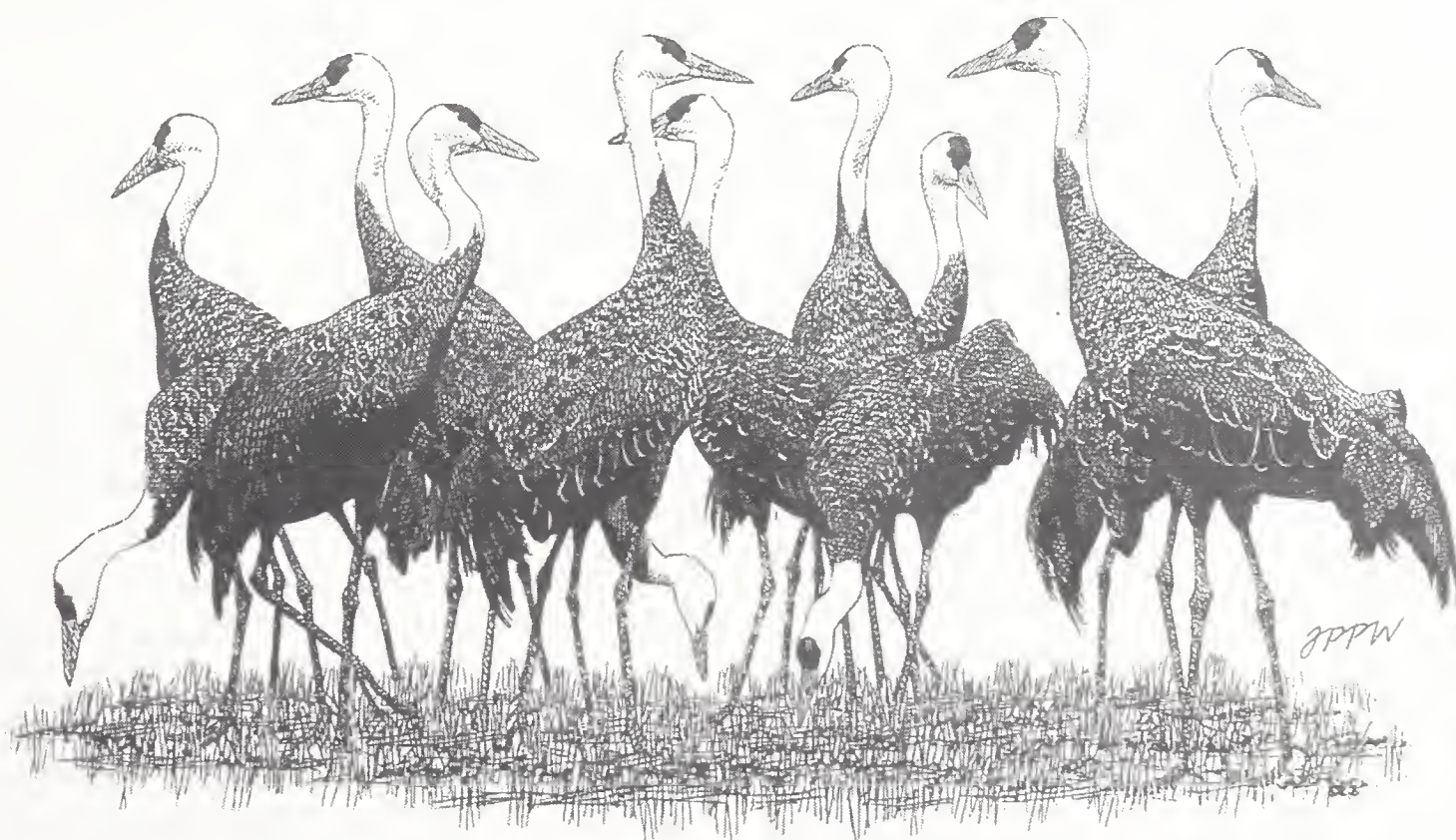
(PD,IB,ER,IR,SRI,LS,PSe), two **Black Storks** *Ciconia nigra* near O Chang Ha, Chhep District, at the border between Preah Vihear and Stung Treng Provinces on 9th February (FG), and several **Purple-backed Starlings** *Sturnus sturninus* at Chez Maryann Bungalow, Sihanoukville on 25th October 2000 (DJ). A visit to the lower Sekong and Sesan Rivers, Stung Treng, NE Cambodia during 9th–12th February (PA,PD,JD,CPT,TS) turned up a number of interesting species, including four **Alexandrine Parakeets** *Psittacula eupatria*, two **Eurasian Thick-knees** *Burhinus oedicephalus* and four **Great Thick-knees** *Esacus recurvirostris* along the lower Sesan River, singles of **Woolly-necked Stork** *Ciconia episcopus* and **Lesser Adjutant** *Leptoptilos javanicus*, six **White-rumped Vultures** *Gyps bengalensis* and at least two **Red-headed Vultures** *Sarcogyps calvus*. Later, on the 25th February, a pair of **Giant Ibises** *Pseudibis gigantea* were seen along the Sekong River north of Siem Pang (NV). A number of interesting observations were made during nine ICF funded ariel surveys for **Sarus Cranes** *Grus antigone* in northern Mondulkiri, southern Ratanakiri, Stung Treng, northern Kompong Thom, Preah Vihear, Siem Reap, Oddar Meanchay and Banteay Meanchay Provinces, from 3rd–11th September 2001 (PD,JB,SK,NN,FG,OR). Regarding Sarus Crane, 33 adults, one chick and 82 nesting territories (including 9 active nests) were recorded. Also of great interest were four **Green Peafowl** *Pavo muticus*, five **Grey-headed Fish Eagles** *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*, at least three **White-rumped Vultures**, a probable **Slender-billed Vulture** *G. tenuirostris* (see Rasmussen and Parry 2001 for this recent taxonomic split), two **Red-**

headed Vultures, 19 Giant Ibises, a single White-shouldered Ibis *P. davisoni*, 21 Greater Adjutants *L. dubius*, and a remarkable 381 Lesser Adjutants *L. javanicus*, 30 Black-necked Storks *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* and 180 Woolly-necked Storks. Interesting counts of large waterbirds in 2001 have included at least 65 Greater Adjutants *L. dubius* at Kruos Kraom, Kompong Thom Province, on 12th–13th July, and a loose flock of at least 80 at Veal Rong Reang, a large 'marsh' abutting the Stung Chinit River, some 30 km to the south-east of Kruos Kraom on 14th July (PD *et al.*). It was not definitely determined whether the same or some of the same individuals were in both areas. A maximum count of 237 Sarus Cranes at Tropeang Thmor Reservoir in February (SRi,SS,BT), was the highest ever recorded from the site. A wounded Great White Pelican *Pelecanus onocrotalus* was photographed on the Tonle Sap on 25th March (TF,MB), and an occupied nest of Milky Stork *Mycteria cinerea* was discovered amongst Painted Storks *M. leucocephala* at the Prek Day Kray Kreng colony, Tonle Sap, on 28th January (FG). Also of great interest was an occupied Giant Ibis nest with one or two young, 17 km from Molu Prey, Chhep District, Preah Vihear during late July and early August 2001 (MW *et al.*). Other recent noteworthy records include Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* at Trapeang Rompeak, Kompong Thom on 30th August 2001 (PD), two Great Thick-knees along the Mekong near Kratie town during 14th–16th April (PD), a summer-plumaged Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* along the Mekong between Kompong Cham and Phnom Penh during 14th–

16th April (PD), a roost of at least 50 Black Kites *Milvus migrans govinda* in open woodland west of Tropeang Thmor Reservoir on 3rd May (FG,GO), the largest congregation in recent history, Grey-headed Fish Eagle at Tropeang Thmor Reservoir during 15th–17th March (HC,CPr), a single Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* over Phum Bos Chambok, c.25 km SE of Kompong Thom town on 24th August 2001 (PD), the second Cambodian record, and a grey morph Black-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus atriceps* at Phnom Kulen National Park on 31st December (FG), perhaps the first documented record from Cambodia.

CHINA

Some news of large waterbirds was extracted from the latest newsletter of the China Ornithological Society (Vol. 10, no. 1) by MR. A flock of 50 Hooded Cranes *Grus monacha* was found in Anqing Yanjiang Nature Reserve (north-east shore of Caizi Hu Lake), southern Anhui on 9th January, and by 14th February, the flock had grown to 105. A flock of over 1,000 Hooded Cranes was recorded flying over Poyang Lake, Jiangxi on 21st December, after 112 birds were seen on the lake two days earlier. This is apparently the first time large numbers have been seen at Poyang. A total of 78 Black-faced Spoonbills *Platalea minor* were recorded at Yancheng National Nature Reserve, Jiangsu in winter 2000/01, as well as 898 Red-crowned Cranes *Grus japonensis*, a small number of White-naped Cranes *G. vipio*, and 300 Eurasian



Hooded Cranes *Grus monacha* by Jan Wilczur

Spoonbills *Platalea leucorodia*. Other interesting sightings in the east included 12 **Little Curlews** *Numenius minutus* by the coast at Bin Hai, south-east of Pudong Airport, Shanghai on 29th April (JH), a single **Yellow-streaked Warbler** *Phylloscopus armandii* at Huanghuacheng, Great Wall, 70 km north of Beijing on 3rd May (JH), and two **Short-tailed Parrotbills** *Paradoxornis davidianus* at Mogan Shan, c.30 km north of Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province on 21st April (JH). Also of interest were at least seven singing male and two female **Reed Parrotbills** *Paradoxornis heudei* at two different reedbed sites by the coast east and south-east of Pudong Airport on 23rd–29th April (JH).

INDIA

Several interesting species were seen during a visit to Gori Ganga Valley, near Nanda Devi, Uttaranachel Pradesh in May (AB). Most notable, was a single male **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza melanocephala* at Milam (3,360 m elevation) on 9th June, while other records included a large group of **Asian House Martins** *Delichon dasypus* nesting on a cliff at Rilkote (3,045 m) on 10th June, and a single male **Fire-tailed Sunbird** *Aethopyga ignicauda* in forest above Munsiri (2,050 m) on 29th May. In Meghalaya, during February–March (AP), a breeding pair of **Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpeckers** *Dendrocopos canicapillus* were observed along the Old Guwahati Road, Shillong on 6th March (a slight ‘known’ range extension and early breeding), an immature **Northern Goshawk** *Accipiter gentilis*, perhaps new for the state, was seen at Mawphlang on 7th March, and singles of both **Dark-breasted Rosefinch** *Carpodacus nipalensis* (new for the state) and **Chestnut Bunting** *Emberiza rutila* were found at Shillong Peak on 8th March. In the north-east, a pair of **Oriental Hobbies** *Falco severus* were seen mating and entering a nest site in one of the large ‘drums’ with a torn cover, on a radio tower between Tinsukia and Guijan, Assam during 13th–18th February (AP). Good records from the Ganges Chars (islands) of Purbasthali, Burdwan District, West Bengal during 29th–31st January (AS) included eight **Baer’s Pochards** *Aythya baeri*, two **Indian Skimmers** *Rynchops albicollis* and a single **Greater Adjutant** *Leptoptilos dubius* on 30th. Also of interest in West Bengal, at Santragachi Jheel, Howrah District, were four **Mallards** *Anas platyrhynchos* on 20th and 15 **Fulvous Whistling-ducks** *Dendrocygna bicolor* and four **Comb Ducks** *Sarkidiornis melanotis* on 23rd January (AS). At

Sagardighi, Malda District, there were at least 300 **Fulvous Whistling-ducks**, a single **Pallas’s Fish Eagle** *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* and 14 **Darters** *Anhinga melanogaster* on 12th March (AS).

INDONESIA

Java

A flock of four **Chestnut-cheeked Starlings** *Sturnus philippensis* at Ragunan Zoo, Jakarta on 28th February (EE, GL), were apparently the first from Java.

Sulawesi

Of note in Dumoga-Bone National Park in August 2001 (PB), were a single **Asian Palm Swift** *Cypsiurus balasiensis* at Toraut on 14th (possibly the first from N Sulawesi) and at least six **Greater Painted-snipes** *Rostratula benghalensis* at Toraut on 15th (possibly the first from Sulawesi).

Sumba

Three possible firsts were recorded during a visit in September 2001 (PB): a single **Asian Dowitcher** *Linnodromus semipalmatus* at Waingapu on 18th–19th, a single **Red Knot** *Calidris canutus* at Waingapu on 23rd and 25th, and a single **Chinese Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter soloensis* near Melolo on 26th. Additionally, a female **Superb Fruit Dove** *Ptilonopus superbus* seen at Gunung Wangamati, was believed to be of an undescribed subspecies.

JAPAN

Just one record was received, of an immature **Lesser Frigatebird** *Fregata ariel* at Ishigaki City, Ishigaki Island, Nansei Shoto (Ryukyu Islands) on 26th–27th June (CR).

MALAYSIA

Peninsular Malaysia

Visits to Pulau Tioman during spring/summer (SR), turned up two apparent new species for the island: at least ten breeding-plumaged **Roseate Terns** *Sterna dougallii* perched on rocks fronting Kampong Paya on 13th–14th June, and a single **Blue-winged Pitta** *Pitta moluccensis* heard at Kampong Paya on 21st March. A single **Black Baza** *Aviceda leuphotes* and nine **Grey-faced Buzzards** *Butastur indicus* migrating over Pulau Tulai on 19th March (SR), were the first records from the Tioman Island group. On the mainland during the same period, several interesting observations were made in Johor. An **Aleutian**

Tern *Sterna aleutica* was observed perched on a piece of driftwood floating off the south coast of the state on 1st April (SR) and a single **Pomarine Jaeger** *Stercorarius pomarinus* was seen off Penggerang the same day (SR); three jaegers in the same area on 18th March were probably also this species. A single **Pale Blue Flycatcher** *Cyornis unicolor* at Panti Forest Reserve on 24th February (WH,LKC,SR) was the first recorded from the state of Johor. An impressive flock of 21 **Rhinoceros Hornbills** *Buceros rhinoceros* was also seen at Panti FR on 25th February (WH,LKC,SR). A family of four **Dusky Eagle Owls** *Bubo coromandus* were seen and photographed at Bukit Merah, Perak on 12th October 2001 (CAL), only the second sighting of the species in 92 years. Also of interest were four **Asian Dowitchers** *Limnodromus semipalmatus* (new state record) and an impressive concentration of 24 **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus* feeding on mudflats at Kampung Kuala Parit Jawa, 15 km south of Muar, Johor on 14th–15th October 2001 (GN,YC). Villagers also report **Lesser Adjutants** to be nesting in the mangroves there.

Sabah

Interesting reports received, were of a large mixed flock of hornbills, including over 25 **Helmeted Hornbills** *Buceros vigil*, at Maliau Basin, near Danum Valley, for a week during March and April (TG), an adult **Lesser Adjutant** *Leptoptilos javanicus* near Bilit Village, lower Kinabatangan River on 26th March (EE,GL), and a single adult **Rufous Night Heron** *Nycticorax caledonicus* on Pulau Sipadan on 8th May (PB). A nest of **Orange-backed Woodpecker** *Reinwardtipicus validus*, containing young, was seen at Gunung Mulu National Park on 25th March (EE,GL), and another was found to be under construction, by the same observers, at Mount Kinabalu National Park (1,800 m elevation) on 11th April.

Sarawak

The only noteworthy record received was of an occupied **Bat Hawk** *Macheiramphus alcinus* nest found by the Melinau River, Gunung Mulu National Park on 20th March (EE,GL).

MYANMAR

Waterbird surveys were carried out in Kachin State, N Myanmar again last winter, during December and January (JV *et al.*). During the latest survey, the Tanai area of the upper Chindwin River was also visited. The most unusual and

indeed incredible report, was of a **Yellow-billed Loon** *Gavia adamsii* seen well on a deep part of the Irrawaddy River at Talawgyi, south of Myitkyina on 12th December. Needless to say, this would be a new record for Myanmar and South-east Asia as a whole. Less astonishing rarities during the survey, all between Myitkyina and Sinbo, included a single **Common Shelduck** *Tadorna tadorna*, 29 **Common Goldeneyes** *Bucephala clangula*, a single **Pied Avocet** *Recurvirostra avosetta* (19th January), four **Mew Gulls** *Larus canus*, 17 **Heuglin's Gulls** *L. heuglini* (no details received for latter) and a single **Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*. Also of note were at least c.30–50 **Green Peafowl** *Pavo muticus* in the Tanai area and another four near Talawgyi, two **White-winged Ducks** *Cairina scutulata* along the Nam Sam Chaung, south of Myitkyina on 16th January, seven **Sarus Cranes** *Grus antigone* at Indawgyi Lake, 34 **Black-winged Stilts** *Himantopus himantopus* at Indawgyi Lake, two **Pallas's Fish Eagles** *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* at Indawgyi Lake on 21st January, a total of eight **White-tailed Eagles** *H. albicilla*, c.12 **Grey-headed Fish Eagles** *Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus* in the Tanai region and another two along the Nam Sam Chaung, four **White-rumped Vultures** *Gyps bengalensis* near Nandebad, south of Myitkyina on 23rd December and another near Mogaung, west of Myitkyina on 31st December, and three **White-bellied Herons** *Ardea insignis*; a single on the Nam Sam Chaung and two in the Tanai area. Noteworthy totals for waterbird species recorded during the survey included 3,123 **Bar-headed Geese** *Anser indicus*, 969 **Greylag Geese** *A. anser*, 3,133 **Ruddy Shelducks** *T. ferruginea*, 2,679 **Gadwall** *Anas strepera*, 1,224 **Ferruginous Pochards** *Aythya nyroca* (1,178 at Indawgyi Lake), 905 **Tufted Ducks** *A. fuligula* (855 at Indawgyi Lake), 67 **Baer's Pochards** *A. baeri* at Indawgyi Lake, 1,973 **Common Cranes** *Grus grus*, 22 **Great Thick-knees** *Esacus recurvirostris* (15 in the Tanai area), 42 **Long-billed Plovers** *Charadrius placidus* (four in the Tanai area), 116 **River Lapwings** *Vanellus duvaucelii*, 2,581 **Small Pratincoles** *Glareola lactea*, 130 **Pallas's Gulls** *Larus ichthyaetus* between Myitkyina and Sinbo, 65 **River Terns** *Sterna aurantia* between Myitkyina and Sinbo, 27 **Great-crested Grebes** *P. cristatus* (one in the Tanai area), 127 **Darters** *Anhinga melanogaster*, 1,012 **Great Cormorants** *Phalacrocorax carbo*, two **Indian Cormorants** *P. fuscicollis*, 511 **Little Cormorants** *P. niger*, 21 **Asian Openbills** *Anastomus oscitans*, 104 **Black Storks** *Ciconia nigra*, 16 **Woolly-necked Storks** *C. episcopus* (two in the Tanai area), two

Black-necked Storks *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* in the Tanai area, 17 **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus* (one in the Tanai area), and 88 **Spot-billed Pelicans** *Pelecanus philippensis*, all but one of which were in the Tanai area. Two flocks of c.150 **Spot-winged Starlings** *Saroglossa spiloptera* were seen near Myitkyina on 30th December.

NEPAL

After a visit to the Langtang region from 11th–24th September 2001 (BR,CY,MF,JK), the following unusual sightings were reported: ten **Himalayan Snowcocks** *Tetraogallus himalayensis* at Singh Gomba (3,500 m elevation), a flock of **Mountain Imperial Pigeons** *Ducula badia* above 3,048 m at Ghore Tabela, a **Black-backed Forktail** *Enicurus immaculatus* above 2,100 m at Tholo Syabru, and a group of three **Black-headed Buntings** *Emberiza melanocephala* at Syabru (c.2,050 m).

NORTH KOREA

A single adult (probably male) **Red-billed Starling** *Sturnus sericeus* seen in a **White-cheeked Starling** *S. cineraceus* roost in the diplomatic compound in Pyongyang on 12th August 2001 (WD), is a potential first for the country.

PHILIPPINES

At Irawan Catchment Area, Palawan in January (PB), there were singles of **Asian Brown Flycatcher** *Muscicapa daurica* on 23rd and **Forest Wagtail** *Dendronanthus indicus* on 31st. On Luzon, the same observer found a single **Ashy-breasted flycatcher** *M. randi* at Mount Makiling on 19th January.

SINGAPORE

Following the discovery of **Lesser Kestrel** *Falco naumanni* in Singapore on 4th January this year, four birds were seen at Changi International Airport on 18th February (WH,LKC,SR). Subsequently, following a storm, a pair were seen on top of a block of flats at Simei on 16th March (SS,SSu,SR). The **Rosy Starling** *Sturnus roseus*, first reported from St. John's Island on 15th January, was seen there again on 1st February (SR). Also of interest were a single **Booted Eagle** *Hieraaetus pennatus* at Tuas on 26th March (SQ,SR), and a single **Vinous-breasted Starling** *S. burmannicus leucocephalus* at Pulau Ubin on 27th March (SQ,RO,SR). An adult and juvenile **Milky**

Stork *Mycteria cinerea*, captured on video at Sungei Buloh Nature Park on 15th April (EE,GL), may or may not have been escaped birds from the Mandai Zoo free-flying stock. A **Barred Eagle Owl** *Bubo sumatranus* at Nee Soon Swamp Forest on 29th May (RO,SR), may be the same individual first discovered at Bukit Timah in October 1996 and subsequently present at Nsee Soon in 1997. If so, it extends the presence of this vagrant to nearly five years. There were no Singapore records between 1925–1995. A single **Pied Imperial Pigeon** *Ducula bicolor* at Pulau Salu on 21st January (KP,RO,SR,MS) and two there on 20th April (BM,LM,RO,SR), were the first recorded from this island. Other new island records included two **Mangrove Whistlers** *Pachycephala grisola* at Lazarus Island on 19th January (RO,SR) and another heard there on 27th February (the first from the Sentosa, St.Johns group of islands), and a female **Black-naped Monarch** *Hypothymis azurea* on Lazarus Island on 19th January (RO,SR), the first from Singapore's southern islands, and perhaps a stray from the Indonesian Riau Islands to the south (it now only occurs locally in the northern islands of Tekong, Tekong Kecil and Ubin). A single **Blue-winged Pitta** *Pitta moluccensis* at Pulau Ubin on 27th January, was probably the first from this island, and a single **Mangrove Pitta** *Pitta megarhyncha* seen and heard at Sungei Buloh NP on April 7th (PBe,SR), was the first wild occurrence on the main island of Singapore in probably more than 25 years. A pair of **Crested Serpent Eagles** *Spilornis cheela*, very probably the last resident in Singapore, was still present at Upper Seletar Reservoir Park on 17th May (RO,SR,GS). An adult was also seen nearby on 14th March (SR). Two young **Spotted Wood Owls** *Strix seloputo*, observed in a nest-hole in a durian tree at Pulau Ubin between 2nd (LKC,SR) and 13th March (RO,SR), provided the first breeding record from Singapore.

SOUTH KOREA

Recent new national records included a single **Caspian Tern** *Sterna caspia* at Nakdong Estuary in late April (NRS), and also in mid-June, an adult **Black Tern** *Chlidonias niger* in breeding plumage at Cheonsu (Sosan) Bay on 18th May (KH-T), singles of **Asian Koel** *Eudynamis scolopacea* (photographed) and **Himalayan Swiftlet** *Collocalia brevirostris* on Gageo (Kago/Huksan) Island on 28th and 3rd May respectively (NM), and a single **Japanese Accentor** *Prunella rubida* at Dadapo, Nakdong Estuary, Busan (Pusan) on 3rd

March (NM,DM,AR). Another potential first, a **Tree Pipit** *Anthus trivialis*, was reported from Gageo Island on 21st April (JO-S). Recent vagrants have included a single **Lesser White-fronted Goose** *Anser erythropus* north of Keum (Kum/Geum) River on 27th January (NM), and another four to six filmed at Suncheon Bay on 6th February (NM,CM), a single **Greylag Goose** *A. anser* at Tongjin River on 20th January (NM), a **Red-crested Pochard** *Rhodonessa rufina* at Sihwa (Shihwa) Lake on 6th December, single **Red Collared Doves** *Streptopelia tranquebarica* at Jeju (Cheju) Island on 15th May (KW-BA), Gageo Island on 29th May (NM) and Cheonsu Bay on 17th June (KH-T), a **Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* near Gageo Island on 14th March (NM), three **Pomarine Jaegers** *Stercorarius pomarinus* (NM) near Gageo Island on 14th March (regularly seen by NM on sea crossings between March and November in south-east and south-west since 1996), a single **Japanese Night Heron** *Gorsachius goisagi* at Jeju Island on 26th April (KW-B), single **Black Drongos** *Dicrurus macrocercus* on Gageo Island on 4th–6th (NM *et al.*) and 29th May (NM), Paldang on 2nd June (LK-S) and Jeju Island on 3rd June (KG-S), many **Japanese Thrushes** *Turdus cardis* on Gageo Island, with a peak of at least seven on 17th April (NM,KS-K), a single (presumed female) **Eurasian Blackbird** *Turdus merula* (poorly photographed and filmed by MBC) on Gageo Island on 13th March (NM), many **Brown Thrushes** *Turdus chrysolaus* (some photographed/filmed), including 150 counted coming in off the sea at Gageo Island on 28th April (NM,CM), single **Japanese Robins** *Erithacus akahige* on Gageo Island on 14th and 15th April and four more on 16th April (NM,KS-K), single **Black Redstarts** *Phoenicurus ochruros* at Gageo Island on 14th (NM,KS-K) and 18th (CY-S,KY-K) April, a single **Northern Wheatear** *Oenanthe oenanthe* at Gageo Island on 21st April (PJ-Y,JO-S), the second national record, a single **Common Starling** *Sturnus vulgaris* at Mankyeong River on 20th January (WBK), at least six **Greater Short-toed Larks** *Calandrella brachydactyla* on Gageo Island on 14th April (NM,KS-K) and another there on 18th April (NM,KS-K), two **Citrine Wagtails** *Motacilla citreola* (photographed/filmed) on Gageo Island on 30th April and one there on 1st May (NM,CM), one or two **Rosy Pipits** *Anthus roseatus* (photographed) on Gageo Island on 13th–16th April (NM,KS-K) and one there on 18th April (CY-S,KY-K). A female-type plumaged **Red-headed** or **Black-headed Bunting** *Emberiza bruniceps* or *melanocephala*, well-filmed on Gageo

Island during 28th April–2nd May (NM,CM), is yet to be identified to species. Good counts during the current period under review included: at least 185,000 **Baikal Teal** *Anas formosa* at Kochonnam, Haenam on 17th January (WBK; filmed by KBS), 10–15 **Scaly-sided Mergansers** *Mergus squamatus* at a new wintering site in the south-east, from mid-January (KS-K) to mid-March (DM,AR *et al.*; filmed by CM), at least 5,700 **Eurasian Oystercatchers** *Haematopus ostralegus* at Yooboo Island, Keum River Estuary mouth on 26th January (WBK), at least 8–10 **Spoon-billed Sandpipers** *Calidris pygmeus* (2–3 filmed) at the Mankyeong River on 24th April (CM,NM), c. 2,400 **Saunders's Gulls** *Larus saundersi* around the south and west coasts in January (WBK), over 200 **Relict Gulls** *Larus relictus* around the coast in January and early February (NM,CM,KS-K,PJ-Y *et al.*), including at least 143 at Song Do, Incheon on 3rd February (NM,CM,KS-K), and c.50 **Narcissus Flycatchers** *Ficedula narcissina* and at least 13 **Japanese Yellow Buntings** *Emberiza sulphurata* at Gageo Island on 20th–23rd April (PJ-Y,JO-S). There were summer records of **White-breasted Waterhen** *Amaurornis phoenicurus*, with one at Cheonsu Bay on 16th June 2001 (KH-K) and five at Namwon on 14th June (KI-G). A nest found at the latter locality on 5th July (KI-G), provided the first confirmed breeding record. A nest of **Dusky Warbler** *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, found in the Seolak (Seorak/Sorak) Mountains, Kangwon Province on 22nd June (PJ-G), was also the first definite breeding record. Three or four adult **Greater Painted-snipes** *Rostratula benghalensis* and a nest were found at Cheonsu Bay during May–June (KH-T); the first breeding from the country was confirmed here in 2000. A survey of **Cinereous Vultures** *Aegypius monachus*, carried out for the National Institute of Environmental Research (organised by KJ-H,PJ-Y), produced an amazing total of 837 at eight different sites along DMZ Area on 23rd December.

TAIWAN

The following vagrants were recorded during January to June: nine **Tundra Swans** *Cygnus columbianus* at Chung-chang-chiao, Taichung on 27th April (CJ-Y), two **Greylag Geese** *Anser anser* at Tien-liao-yang, Taipei on 7th January (C-K), four **Greater White-fronted Geese** *A. albifrons* at Wen-ti, Ilan from 28th January to 21st February (LF-T) and another flying south at Lanyu Island on 25th February (JND), a single **Bean Goose** *A. fabalis* at Lung-luan-tan, Pingtung on 6th April

(LC-L), a **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* at Tou-cheng, Ilan on 4th April (LF-T), seven **Common Shelducks** *T. tadorna* at Tseng-wen Estuary, Tainan from 6th January to 14th February (HS-C, FY-T, LK-A), a single **American Wigeon** *Anas americana* at Szu-tsao, Tainan on 5th February (FY-T), two **Philippine Ducks** *Anas luzonica* at Pu-tze river, Chiayi on 24th January (CY-H), three Smew *Mergellus albellus* at Lung-luan-tan, on 6th April (LC-L), a **Red-breasted Merganser** *Mergus serrator* at Kao-mei, Taichung on 21st January (LM-F), two **Eurasian Wrynecks** *Jynx torquilla* at Tatu Estuary, Taichung on 4th February (CT-C), a single **Collared Kingfisher** *Todirhamphus chloris* at Szu-tsao, Tainan on 19th March (FY-T), a **Lesser Cuckoo** *Cuculus poliocephalus* at Tien-liao-yang on 1st May (CS-C), three **Dollarbirds** *Eurystomus orientalis* at Chi-pei, Penghu Archipelago on 8th May (PC-Y), a **Grass Owl** *Tyto capensis* at Chiayi Airport on 1st May (WC-H), a **Japanese Wood Pigeon** *Columba janthina* at Kao-mei on 16th April (LM-F), a single **Baillon's Crake** *Porzana pusilla* at Kuan-tu Taipei on 16th February (C-c), a **White-browed Crake** *P. cinerea* at Ta-tu Estuary, Taichung on 12th May (CS-S), three **Long-billed Dowitchers** *Limnodromus scolopaceus* at Hsia-pu, Ilan on 6th January (LF-T) and at Yen-shiu Estuary, Tainan on 11th April (FY-T), a single **Pectoral Sandpiper** *Calidris melanotos* at Kang-nan, Hsinchu on 22nd April (LW-H), a **Grey Phalarope** *Phalaropus fulicarius* at Ta-yuan, Taoyuan on 18th–22nd February (HM-C, LK-A), a single **Eurasian Oystercatcher** *Haematopus ostralegus* at Tung-shih, Chiayi on 8th January (TC-Y), a **Common Ringed Plover** *Charadrius hiaticula* at Kao-mei on 24th February (CS-S), three **Long-billed Plovers** *C. placidus* at Tien-liao-yang on 28th February (HY-M), seven **Oriental Plovers** *C. veredus* at Ta-yuan on 1st April (TM-H), a single **Pallas's Gull** *Larus ichthyaetus* at Pei-men, Tainan on 18th February (WL-L), the third from Taiwan, a single **White-tailed Eagle** *Haliaeetus albicilla* at Kuan-ying-shan, Taipei on 30th April (HY-M), two **Pied Harriers** *Circus melanoleucos* at Changhwa hawk-watching platform on 5th April (LH-C), a single **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* at Chi-shan, Kaohsiung on 18th January (HF-K), an **Imperial Eagle** *A. heliaca* at Kuan-ying-shan on 1st May (HY-M), three **Masked Boobies** *Sula dactylatra* at Tiao-Yu-Tai Islets 1st June (HM-C), two **Black Bitterns** *Dupetor flavicollis* at Wen-ti, Ilan on 24th May (LF-T), single **Von Schrenck's Bitterns** *Ixobrychus eurhythmus* at Chi-pei on 20th May (PC-Y), Sung-shan, Taipei on 31st May (WC-H) and

Tai-ta, Taipei on 1st–4th June (CS-C), seven **Fairy Pittas** *Pitta nympha* at Shih-men Reservoir, Taoyuan on 18th May (KJ-Y), a single **Tiger Shrike** *Lanius tigrinus* at Hsiu-ku-luan-hsi, Hwalien on 12th May (CS-C), six **Rooks** *Corvus frugilegus* at Ta-chu, Taoyuan on 21st February (LK-A), a **Daurian Jackdaw** *C. dauuricus* at Lan-yu, Taitung on 1st April (HM-C), two **Black-winged Cuckooshrikes** *Coracina melaschistos* at Li-ting-shan, Pingtung on 5th February (HP-H), 18 **Ashy Minivets** *Pericrocotus divaricatus* at Jen-shan, Ilan on 16th March (HL-C), single **Ashy Drongos** *Dicrurus leucophaeus* at Li-ting-shan on 28th February (CY-H) and Yeh-liu, Taipei on 11th May (HK-L), two **Spangled Drongos** *Dicrurus hottentottus* at Yeh-liu on 22nd April (CS-C), two **Japanese Thrushes** *Turdus cardis* at Yeh-liu on 14th April (CW-S), a **Siberian Thrush** *Zoothera sibirica* at Hu-pen, Yunlin on 24th March (TM-C), single **Yellow-rumped Flycatchers** *Ficedula zanthopygia* at An-ma-shan, Taichung on 29th May (HL-W) and Chi-pei on 13th May (PC-Y), two **Red-breasted Flycatchers** *F. parva* at Yeh-liu on 22nd April (CS-C), a single **Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica* at Chi-pei on 3rd–6th May (PC-Y), a **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros* at Yeh-liu on 21st April (CM-L), single **Black-browed Reed Warblers** *Acrocephalus bistrigiceps* at Hsia-pu, Ilan on 15th April (HM-C) and She-Tze, Taipei on 19th May (TC-S),) two **Asian Stubtails** *Urosphena squameiceps* at Fu-yuan, Hwalien on 17th January (LW-K), three **Middendorff's Warblers** *Locustella ochotensis* at Kuan-tu, Taipei on 15th April (CM-L), two **Dusky Warblers** *Phylloscopus fuscatus* at Yeh-liu on 22nd April (LK-A), two **Eastern Crowned Warblers** *P. coronatus* and three **Pale-legged Leaf Warbler** *P. tenellipes* at Yeh-liu on 26th April (CM-L), five **Pallas's Leaf Warblers** *P. proregulus* at Yeh-liu on 25th March (LK-A), a single **Japanese Waxwing** *Bombycilla japonica* at Wen-ti, Ilan on 24th May (CC-P), a **Bohemian Waxwing** *B. garrulus* at Chin-shan, Taipei on 15th April (LH-C), single **Citrine Wagtails** *Motacilla citreola* at Chin-shan on 26th April (CM-L) and Kuan-tu on 3rd May (T-C), 250 **Grey-capped Greenfinches** *Carduelis sinica* at Hua-tan, Changhwa on 6th January (YS-C), a single **Grey Bunting** *Euberyza variabilis* at Yeh-liu on 5th April (CY-Y), the third record, a Rustic Bunting *E. rustica* at Kuan-tu on 6th January (CS-C), two **Tristram's Buntings** *E. tristrami* at Yeh-liu on 21st–25th April (LK-A, CS-C), five **Chestnut Buntings** *E. rutila* at Tien-liao-yang, Taipei on 1st May (CS-C), a female **Black-headed Bunting** *E. melanocephala* at Chin-shan, Taipei on 29th April (TM-H), the fourth

record from Taiwan, and a single **Reed Bunting** *E. schoeniclus* at Ta-yuan on 20th April (C-Y). High counts of globally threatened species included 186 **Chinese Egrets** *Egretta eulophotes* at Tse-Hu, Kimmen Island on 23rd April (LC-F), 447 **Black-faced Spoonbills** *Platalea minor* at Tseng-wen Estuary on 20th February (FY-T), and 311 **Saunders's Gulls** *Larus saundersi* at Han-pao, Changhwa on 21st January (SS-Y). A single **Chinese Crested Tern** *Sterna bernsteini* was seen at Pei-men on 8th April (HN-M).

THAILAND

There have been two more new species for Thailand, a male **Pallid Harrier** *Circus macrourus* over Khuan Khisian, Thale Noi, Phatthalung on 24th February (STh,TY), and a new resident species, **Long-tailed Wren Babbler** *Spelaornis chocolatinus*, two pairs of which were found and another bird heard around the summit (2,152 m elevation) of the highest mountain in Umphang Wildlife Sanctuary, Tak on 24th–25th April (APa,PR,SSri). New populations of other expected high-elevation birds at this site, already found on Doi Mokoju to the south, included **Rusty-capped Fulvetta** *Alcippe dubia*, **Chestnut-tailed Minla** *Minla strigula*, **Burmese Yuhina** *Yuhina humilis*, **White-browed Shortwing** *Brachypteryx montana*, **Yellow-bellied Fantail** *Rhipidura hypoxantha* and **Green-tailed Sunbird** *Aethopyga nipalensis*. Rarities since December 2000 have included a **Pied Cuckoo** *Clamator jacobinus* reported from Mae Sarieng, Mae Hongson on 27th May (PW), two **Bar-headed Geese** *Anser indicus* still present on the Mekong River at Chiang Saen, Chiang Rai on 1st March (STho) and two **Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea* there on the same date, the long-staying **Common Crane** *Grus grus* still present at Chiang Saen on 7th March (ST), at least four breeding-plumaged **Little Stints** *Calidris minuta* reported from salt-pans at Kalong amongst 350 **Red-necked Stints** *C. ruficollis* on 10th April (WS), with one still present on 14th April (PR,SSri), single **Oriental Plovers** *Charadrius veredus* near Khlong Rang, Prachinburi on 25th March (KN) and at Rama 6 Camp, Cha-am, Phetchaburi on 4th May (PS,WY), a single **Chinese Egret** *Egretta eulophotes* photographed at Laem Pakarang, Phang-nga on 15th April (PKr,KSu,STho), a **Black-faced Spoonbill** *Platalea minor* photographed at Nong Sanoh, Prakornchai district, Buriram on 15th December (per PR), single breeding-plumaged **Indian Pond Herons** *Ardeola grayii* at Rangjan, Samut Sakhon on 14th April and Khao

Sam Roi Yot on 30th April (PR,SSri), and the **Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*, still present at Mae Taeng, Chiang Mai on 7th March (ST). Significant distribution records came in the form of a male **Malaysian Honeyguide** *Indicator archipelagicus* in the Bala Sector of Hala-Bala, Narathiwat on 31st May (ST), **Grey-headed Parakeet** *Psittacula finschii* reported from Si Muang Mai, Ubon Ratchathani on 6th July (WK), a **Rufous-backed Kingfisher** *Ceyx rufidorsa* at Km 16 Kaeng Krachan National Park on 23rd June (BK,KSr,AW), a grey morph **Oriental Cuckoo** *Cuculus saturatus* reported from Chong Yen, Mae Wong National Park on 21st February (KS,WS), a pair of **Whiskered Treeswifts** *Hemiprocne comata* at Km 17, Phanoen Thung Road, Kaeng Krachan NP, Phetchaburi on 25th February (CG), a single **Grey Nightjar** *Caprimulgus indicus* photographed at Kaem Ling Nong Yai, Chumphon on 10th May (AN,CN; also a very late date), two pairs of **Malaysian Plovers** *Charadrius peronii* reported from Patiu District, Chumphon on 2nd June (KR), 18 **Bridled Terns** *Sterna anaethetus* said to be nesting on Hin Ngaam Islets, Patiu District, Chumphon on 1st June (KR), **Grey-headed Fish Eagle** *Ichthyophaga ichthyaeetus* reported from Khlong Saeng Wildlife Sanctuary, Surat Thani on 7th July (STh), a male **Pied Harrier** *Circus melanoleucos* at Ban Khlong Rat, Sri Mahaphot District, Prachinburi on 24th March (JND,PR,SSr,STh), two **Rufous-winged Buzzards** *Butastur liventer* in each of Si Muang Mai and Khong Chiam Districts of Ubon Rathchathani during June (and a number of nestlings in the possession of villagers; WK), a single **Greater Spotted Eagle** *Aquila clanga* over Phaen Din Samur, Krabi/Trang on 1st April (YM,SR), an **Oriental Hobby** *Falco severus* reported from the summit of Doi Samur Dao, Sri Nan National Park, Nan on 4th July (PJ,NNu), a **Northern Hobby** *F. subbuteo* reported over Phu Chi Fa, east Chiang Rai on 18th April (SK), two breeding-plumaged **Javan Pond Herons** *A. speciosa* at Hat Sai Ri, Mu Ko Chumphon National Park, Chumphon on 8th May (CN), a **House Crow** *Corvus splendens* in Krabi on 5th June (DBu), a **Scaly Thrush** *Zoothera dauma* at Thung Tieo, Krabi during 18th–28th February (YM), a pair of **Slaty-backed Flycatchers** *Ficedula hodgsonii* at Mae Wong NP on 16th February (KS,WS), **Dusky Crag Martins** *Hirundo concolor* reported from Phu Chi Fa on 17th April (SK), three **White-vented Mynas** *Acridotheres grandis* with 30 **Jungle Mynas** *A. fuscus* at Pak Mae Nam Tapli, Surat Thani on 17th April (PP), and **Blyth's Leaf Warblers** *Phylloscopus reguloides*

singing and showing wing-flicking behaviour indicative of breeding at Umphang WS (2,000 m) during 24th–25th April (PR). Many **Rusty-capped Fulvettas** were again seen at Mae Wong NP (1,600–1,950 m) on 16th February (KS,WS). A number of interesting species were found during a visit to Ko Surin, S Thailand, during 3rd–5th February (WS): a pair of **Large Green Pigeons** *Treron capellei*, a pair of **Beach Thick-knees** *Esacus neglectus*, two **Black Bazas** *Aviceda leuphotes*, five **Oriental Honey-buzzards** *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, a **Japanese Sparrowhawk** *Accipiter gularis* and an **Orange-headed Thrush** *Zoothera citrina*. Noteworthy breeding records this year have included fledged young **Crimson-winged Woodpeckers** *Picus puniceus* and a nest of **Thick-billed Spiderhunter** *Arachnothera crassirostris* containing young (perhaps the first definite one found anywhere to date) in the Bala section of Hala/Bala on 8th June (ST), a fledgling **Drongo Cuckoo** *Surniculus lugubris* being fed by a **Common Tailorbird** *Orthotomus sutorius*, a new brood-host, at Krung Ching on 12th August (ST), two **Chestnut-tailed Starlings** *S. malabaricus* entering a nest-hole carrying food to at least four chicks at Kasetsart University, Kamphaengsaen, Nakhon Pathom on 16th April (SK), the first confirmed breeding record from C Thailand, **Puff-throated Bulbul** *Alophoixus pallidus* carrying food at Doi Chiang Dao on 3rd April (WS), an adult **Orange-bellied Leafbird** *Chloropsis hardwickii* accompanying a fledgling and a nest of **Ratchet-tailed Treepie** *Temnurus temnurus* with young at Kaeng Krachan NP on 5th and 7th April respectively (ST), **White-browed Piculet** *Sasia ochracea* excavating a nest-hole, fledged young **Flavescent Bulbuls** *Pycnonotus flavescens*, and an occupied **Bronzed Drongo** *Dicrurus aeneus* nest all at Mae Wong NP on 21st February (KS,WS), a **Snowy-browed Flycatcher** *F. hyperythra* carrying nest material at Doi Inthanon NP on 4th March (ST), and **Plain Sunbird** *Anthreptes simplex* with recently fledged young at Krung Ching on 13th August (ST). Some exciting news was received from Thung Tha Laad (Suan Somdej Srinagarind), on the outskirts of Nakhon Si Thammarat, S Thailand, where one of the most significant waterbird sites in Thailand has recently come to light. When the site was visited on 10th April (PAR,PR), there were at least 40 nests of **Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea*, several hundred nests of **Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*, several hundred **Little Egrets** *Egretta garzetta* (none seen at the nest, but copulation observed), and up to a hundred each of **Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax*

nycticorax (?breeds) and **Little Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax niger* (winters only). During another visit later in the breeding season (CT), no fewer than 243 **Purple Heron** nests were counted. The nesting colony of **Darters** *Anhinga melanogaster* and other waterbirds on the land of LSS at Mu 18, Khlong Malakaw Tai, Muang District, Sa Kaeo was deserted when visited on 24th March, though a single **Darter** was present on Phu Ngern Reservoir, c.20 km to the south (JND,PR,SSr,STh). During a visit to the colony on 8th May 2001 (KB,SKCC) however, 20 **Darters** were present and there were said to be eight nests, there were 30 Purple Herons with two nests, many tens of **Little Cormorants** and **Black-crowned Night Herons**, and more than 1,000 **Little Egrets**, **Cattle Egrets** and, reportedly, **Intermediate Egrets** *Mesophoyx intermedia*. Since the latter is not known to breed in Thailand it is important that the site is visited to obtain confirmation of this. Other records of scarce large waterbirds included a single **Black-headed Ibis** *Threskiornis melanocephalus* at Thung Kha (Ao Sawi), south of Chumphon on 6th (STh *et al.*) and 29th (EC,PCo,YP) April, 32 **Painted Storks** *Mycteria leucocephala* over Sena District, Ayutthaya on 24th July (JP), and at least five or six **Lesser Adjutants** *Leptoptilos javanicus* at Ko Pratong, Kura Buri, Phang-nga on 3rd and 4th March (WKO,DP,WS). A number of unseasonal records were received: **Osprey** *Pandion haliaetus* at Bang Khunthien campus of King Mongkuts University of Technology, Thonburi on 14th June (GG,PR) and another two reported to be displaying at the Sirindhorn Dam, Ubon Ratchathani on 7th July (WK), **Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea* on Doi Inthanon on 24th June (per CK), the earliest ever recorded, an **Oriental Reed Warbler** *Acrocephalus orientalis* at Laem Phak Bia on 7th–8th July (PR), which possibly oversummered somewhere in the region, since it had not yet undergone any moult, a **Tiger Shrike** *Lanius tigrinus* on Khao Phanoen Thung, Kaeng Krachan NP during 26th–27th February (WS), and a male **Yellow-rumped Flycatcher** *Ficedula zanthopygia* at the Visitor Centre, Kaeng Krachan NP on 24th February (AWa). Also of interest were two **Eastern Curlews** *Numenius madagascariensis* at Krabi mudflats on 7th April (PC), ten **Nordmann's Greenshanks** *Tringa guttifer* (an unprecedented number for the inner Gulf of Thailand) at Kalong, Samut Sakhon on 1st May (KK,PK), 40–50 **Amur Falcons** *Falco amurensis* over Doi Ang Khang, Chiang Mai on 21st April (JG,UT), and a flock of 300 **Chestnut Buntings**

Emberiza rutila on the Huai Mae Ki in Mae Wong NP on 14th February (KS,WS).

VIETNAM

During the spring **White-eared Night Heron** *Gorsachius magnificus* was observed in forest fragments in Bac Kan and Tuyen Quang Provinces, E Tonkin (per JE). Also of interest in this region were a single **Chinese Leaf Warbler** *Phylloscopus sichuanensis* at the transmitter tower, Tam Dao on the 22nd February (SN,IP), and at least ten **Grey-capped Greenfinches** *Carduelis sinica* at Bai Chay Beach, Halong City on 25th and 26th February (SN,IP). A single **Black Bittern** *Dupetor flavicollis* at Cat Tien National Park, Cochinchina in early August 2000 (RJ) and a **Jerdon's Baza** *Aviceda jerdoni* at Cuc Phuong National Park, E Tonkin in late August 2001 (RJ) both represented unseasonal/new seasonal records.

Contributors:

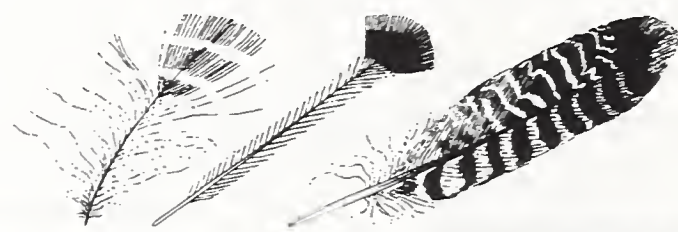
P. Alstrom (PA), Anon (JD,SS; in Cambodia Birds News 7. SK [choice of two], in Bird Conservation Society of Thailand bulletin Vol. 18, no. 7), P. Archarit (PAr), J. Barzen (JB), I. Beasley (IB), P. Benstead (PB), P. Beuret (PBe), Birdquest, D. Bishop (DB), Mr. Bo (MB), K. Boonchoosawang (KB), Yi Boros (YB), A. Brooks (AB), D. Buckingham (DBu), H. Chamnan (HC), Chan A.L. (CAL), Chang J-Y (CJ-Y), Chen C-P (CC-P), Chen S-C (CS-C), Chen S-S (CS-S), Chen Y-H (CY-H), Chen Y-Y (CY-Y), Chiang-chung (C-c), Chang-kung (C-k), Chiang M-L (CM-L), Chiang T-C (CT-C), Choi Jong-In (CJ-I), Choi Yu-Sung (CY-S), Chung W-S (CW-S), Chung-Yuan (C-Y), Chung Y-H (CY-H), P. Clement (PC), E. Collaerts (EC), P. Collaerts (PCo), Coppersmith Group (CG; field Leaders S. Pomankul and K. Ratanajun), P. Davidson (PD), W. Duckworth (WD), J.N. Dymond (JND), J. Eames (JE), E. Ervasti (EE), T. Falise (TF), D. Farrow (DF), Field Guides, M. Fletcher (MF), Fu Y-T (FY-T), G. Gale (GG), J. Gee (JG), F. Goes (FG), T. Greer (TG), J. Hammar (JH), Hao L-W (HL-W), P. Holt (PH), Hsiao M-C (HM-C), Hu L-C (HL-C), Huang F-K (HF-K), Huang K-L (HK-L), Huang N-M (HN-M), Huang P-H (HP-H), Huang S-C (HS-C), Huang Y-M (HY-M), W. Hull (WH), International Crane Foundation (ICF), G. Jackson (GJ), R. Jahraus (RJ), D. Judell (DJ), P. Julawat (PJ), Jung Ok-Sik (JO-S), KBS TV (KBS), J. Keating (JK), B. Khiawyu (BK), Kim Gi-Sam (KG-S), S. Kimhout (SKi), Kim Hyun-Tai

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Rasmussen, P.C. and Parry S. J. (2001) The taxonomic status of the 'Long-billed' Vulture *Gyps indicus*. *Vulture News* 44: 18-21.

Stray Feathers



Kukila

Notice to subscribers/ contributors and Call for illustrator

Kukila is the annual bulletin of the Indonesian Ornithological Society, publishing articles and short communications about all aspects concerning Indonesian birds, as well as reviews and summaries of recent literature. Beginning in 1985 under the editorship of Derek Holmes and Prof S Somadikarta, *Kukila* has emerged as the primary source of information on birds of this megadiverse region. Following the untimely death of Derek Holmes, Richard Noske has taken over as editor of the journal.

If you have any interesting observations or records of birds in Indonesia, please email Richard on:

richard.noske@ntu.edu.au.

Or mail to: Dr Richard Noske, Editor *Kukila*, Faculty of SITE, Northern Territory University, Darwin, NT. 0909. Australia.

For more information about *Kukila*, including a list of the contents of the most recent 10 volumes, visit our website at: www.zoo.nsw.gov.au/kukila

The journal is expected to undergo a partial moult in the near future, including a new illustration on the front cover. The editor is seeking expressions of interest from illustrators who wish to make their mark on this significant regional journal.

Records wanted

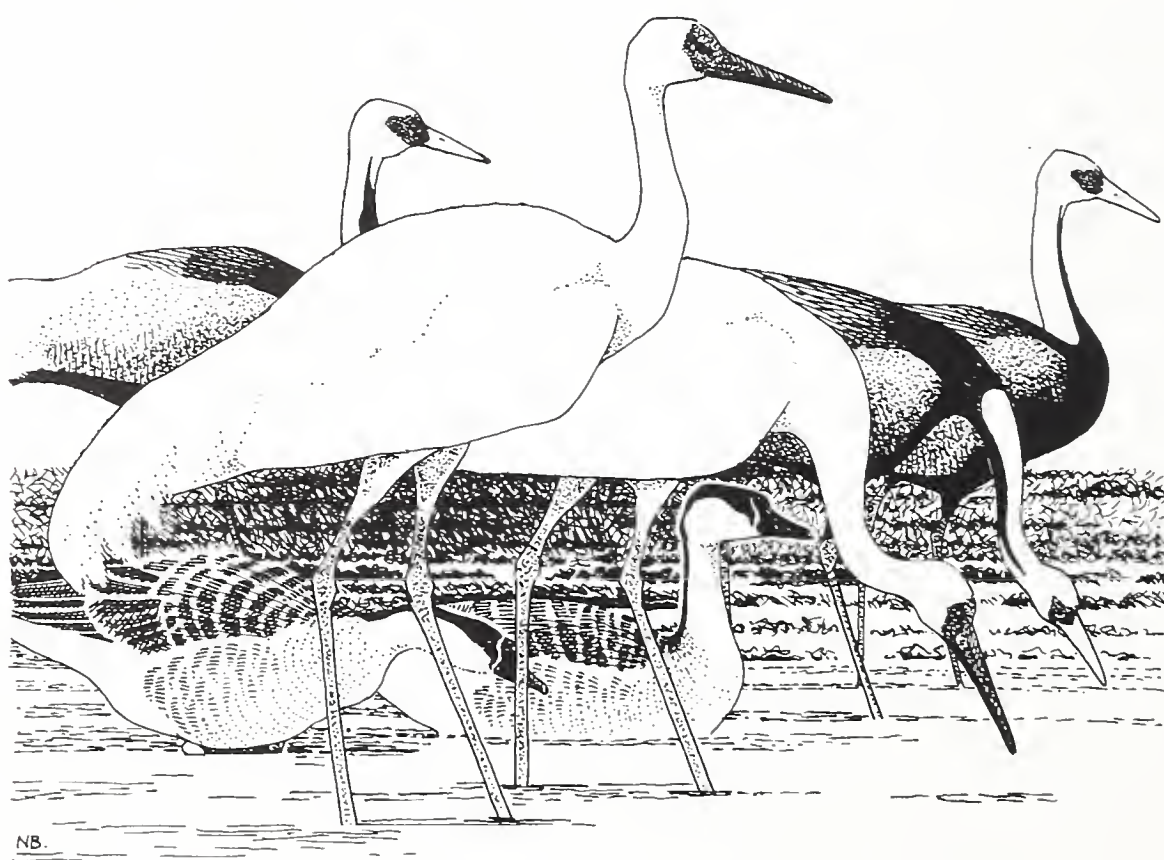
Wetlands International - Asia Pacific coordinates the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC). The Census runs parallel to other waterbird censuses in Africa, Europe and the Neotropics under the umbrella of the International Waterbird Census (IWC).

The AWC covers most Asian and pacific countries, from Pakistan eastwards and aims to obtain information on an annual basis of waterbird populations at wetlands in the region during the non-breeding period of most species (January), as a basis for the evaluation and monitoring of populations and sites. It also aims to encourage a greater interest in waterbirds and wetlands amongst people, thereby promoting

conservation of wetlands and waterbirds in the region.

Waterbirds counted during the census include all species of grebes, cormorants, pelicans, herons, egrets, storks, ibises, spoonbills, flamingoes, ducks, geese, swans, cranes, rails, jacanas, shorebirds, gulls, terns, and raptors usually associated with wetlands.

The AWC plays a significant role at both national and international level. For example, the Ramsar Convention encourages regular monitoring of waterbirds by its Contracting Parties as the basis for the identification of many wetlands of international importance. The Asia-Pacific Migratory Waterbird Conservation Strategy: 2001-2005 is also based on AWC data.



Siberian Crane *Grus leucogeranus*, White-naped Crane *G. vipio* and Swan Goose *Anser cygnoides* by Nik Borrow, (Courtesy of Birdquest)

Wetlands International is currently compiling the five-year (1997-2001) AWC report. In order to include as much information as possible, we would be pleased to receive wintering count information from the region (December to February) over the past five years. We would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have already contributed.

For more information contact: David Li, AWC International Coordinator & Waterbird Conservation Officer, Wetlands International - Asia Pacific, 3A39, Block A, Kelana Centre Point, SS7/19, 47301 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia
Tel: 603 704 6770
Fax: 603 704 6772
Web: <http://www.wetlands.org>

2002 International Crane Workshop – Beijing

The China Ornithological Society and the International Crane Foundation will hold an International Crane Workshop in Beijing, China from 8th to 10th August, 2002.

The workshop will summarise research on the world's cranes and their habitats, promote scientific research and conservation of cranes, and strengthen international information exchange. Topics to be covered include crane migration, cranes and people, captive breeding and the future direction of crane research. No tours or field trips are planned but participants are invited to join events scheduled after the 23rd International Ornithological Congress, also taking place in Beijing from 11th to 17th August 2002.



White-naped Crane *Grus vipio* by Craig Robson

Errata

In *Stray Feathers*, issue 33, the dates of the 23rd IOC were incorrect. They should have read '11th to 17th August, 2002'. In addition, the line

drawing of Swinhoe's Pheasant *Lophura swinhoii* (p.47) was incorrectly labelled as Vietnamese Pheasant *L. hatinhensis*. Apologies to the artist – eds.

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Whilst the Editor is always pleased to discuss possible contributions with potential authors, and to advise on preparation, it would be helpful if the following guidelines could be adhered to:

1. **Articles** These should be written clearly, preferably typed, on one side of the page, with all lines double-spaced, leaving wide margins, and should be no longer than 2,000 words. Scientific names should appear at the first mention of each species or, if all species appear in a table, they may be given there instead. Scientific names should, where possible, follow T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey and W. Duckworth (1996) *An annotated checklist of the birds of the Oriental Region*.

Any tables to accompany articles should be prepared on separate pieces of paper, and be thoroughly checked. Titles of tables should be self-explanatory. Diagrams should be clearly drawn, in ink, ideally 15 cm wide and 11 cm high. References should be cited in the order in which they appear during the paper in the same style used in this Bulletin.

It would be helpful if two copies of each contribution could be submitted, and also if possible the text submitted on a computer disk, ideally in Microsoft Word, in either PC or Macintosh format.

2. **From the field** These should follow the format in the current edition of the OBC Bulletin, and be sent to the Bulletin Editor, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.
3. **News/Information** Typed or handwritten contributions should be sent to the Bulletin Editor, OBC, c/o The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK.

Although every effort is made to retain all articles in their submitted form, the Editorial Committee reserves the right to make changes that it deems necessary, and, in a minimum of cases, without prior reference to the author. It is assumed that all contributors submitting material understand and accept these conditions. All contributors, photographers and artists, in submitting material for the OBC Bulletin, also give permission for their work to be used in the OBC Internet pages.

For Around the Orient, Recently Published, Stray Feathers and Free Press, the deadline for submission of material is 28th February (Spring Bulletin) and 31st August (Autumn Bulletin). The deadlines do not apply to main articles which will be published as soon as possible after acceptance by the Editorial Committee.

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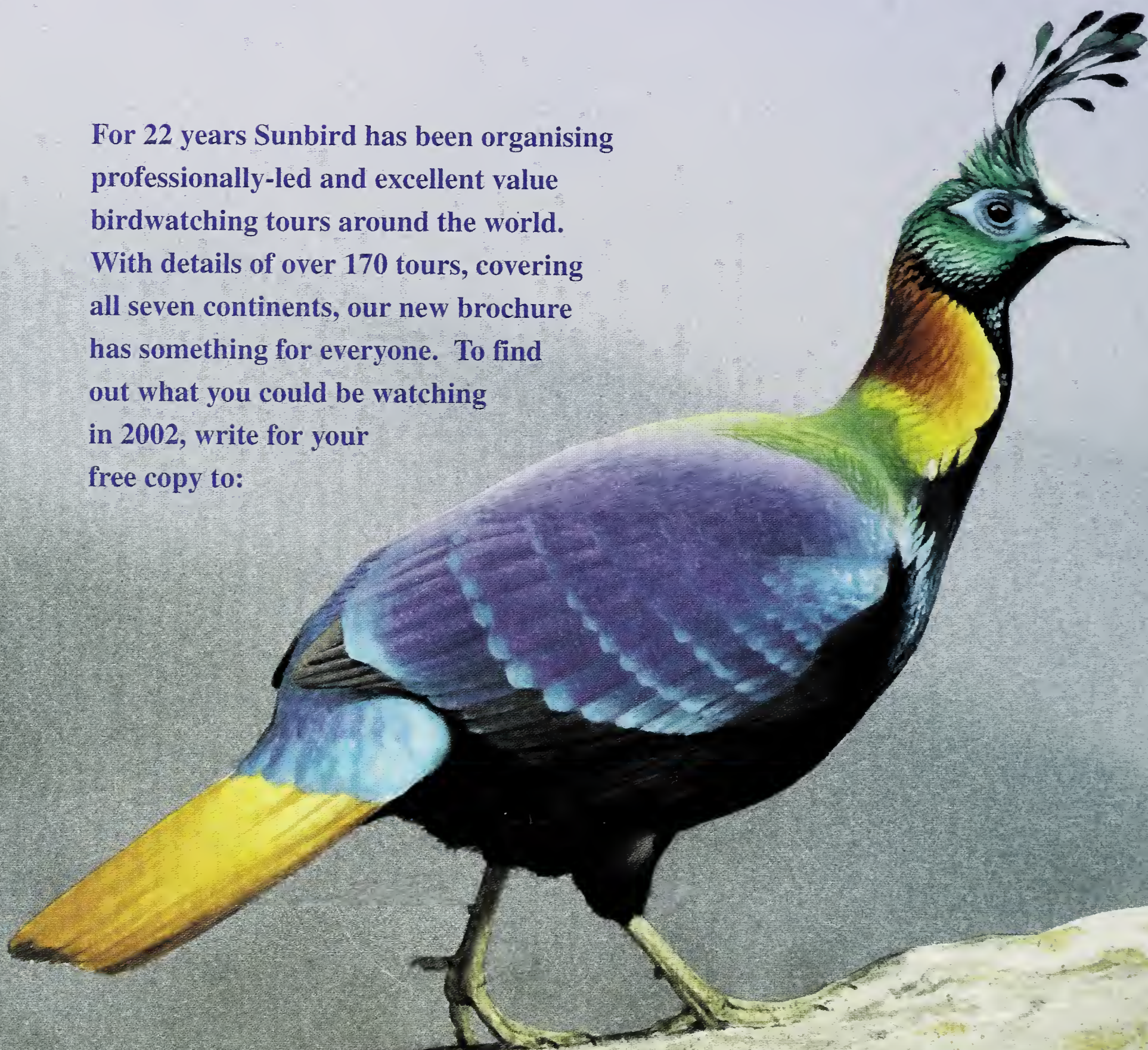


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